MAY/JUNE 2019

intercom

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

IS THAT ALL THERE IS? HOW TO ADVANCE IN YOUR CAREER WITHOUT LOSING YOUR MOJO 6

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH PURPOSE: CAREER SUCCESS IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE 9

GETTING UNSTUCK: REPURPOSING YOUR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO CLIMB YOUR CAREER LADDER, EARN MORE MONEY, AND ENJOY YOUR WORK 12

NEGOTIATION SKILLS: THE MISSING AGREEMENT TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT 15

CONDUCTING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS 19

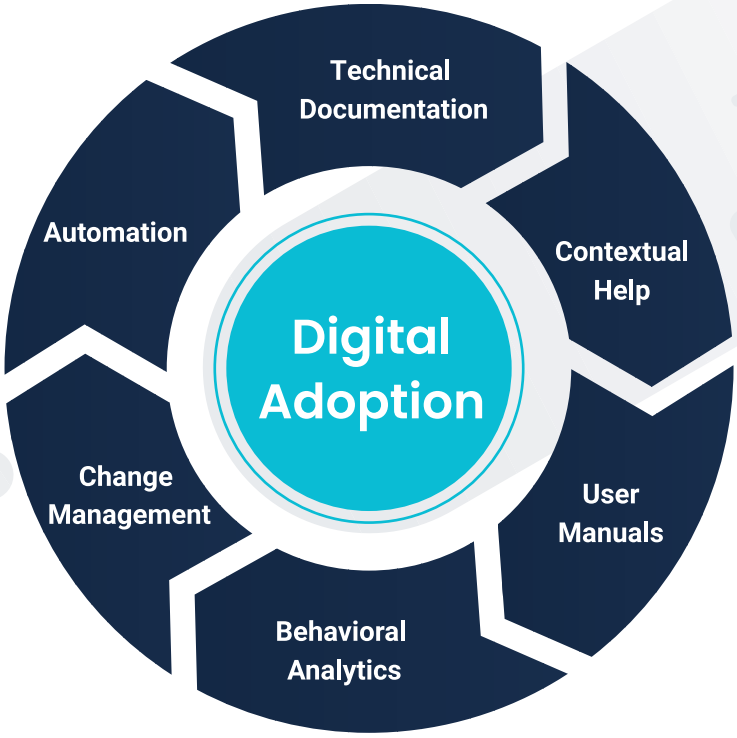
GROWING YOUR CAREER WHILE KEEPING YOUR JOB 21

PURPOSEFUL PARTNERSHIP: CODE FOR AMERICA BRIGADE CHAPTERS AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK FOR TECHNICAL WRITERS 24

whatfix

Are You Still Using Traditional Product Help?

Whatfix helps you transform your product documentation, making it interactive, engaging and available in real-time within the app.



How Does Whatfix Help You?

- Compatible with all web-based applications
- Efficient multilingual authoring, instant publishing and editing
- Measure your product documentation effectiveness
- SCORM compliant content production available instantly in multiple formats like Pdfs, videos, slides, and smart URLs

AVNET · CardinalHealth · SOPHOS · ManpowerGroup · cisco · bmc

sales@whatfix.com | +1800-459-7098 | @whatfix

All-in-one

Deliver a consistent experience at every stage of the customer journey by bringing marketing and technical content onto a single platform, with **XML Documentation for Adobe Experience Manager**.

bit.ly/DITA-CCMS

Get in touch

techcomm@adobe.com

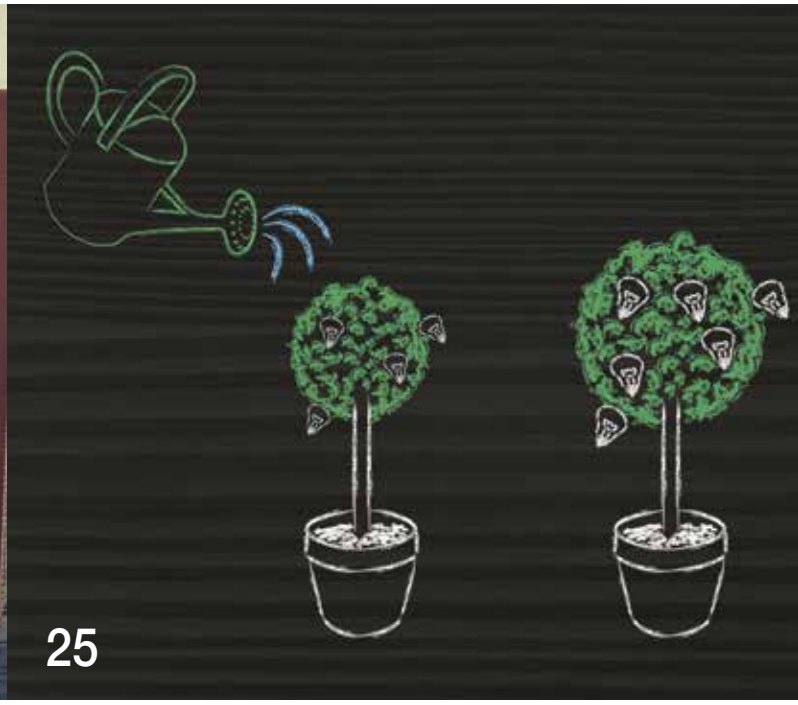
+1-408-536-1144

Adobe DITA World 2019

Register now for the world's biggest DITA online conference.

www.dita-world.com

© 2019 Adobe Inc. All rights reserved.



May/June 2019

Volume 66 | Issue 3

4 **From the Editor**

FEATURES

6 **Is That All There Is? How to Advance in Your Career without Losing Your Mojo**
By Andrew Lawless
Andrew looks at how technical communicators can benefit from coaching from mentors, peers, and professionals.

9 **David vs. Goliath: Finding Our Slingshot as Technical Writers**
By Gabby Pascuzzi
A transcript of the 2019 STC Summit Honors Event talk about Gabby's experiences as a technical writer and as a competitor on the 37th season of *Survivor*.

13 **Professional Development with Purpose: Career Success in Your Current Role**
By Alyssa Fox
Alyssa details how professional development benefits both technical communicators and the companies for which they work, and what opportunities for growth might be available at their current organizations.

16 **Getting Unstuck: Repurposing Your Technical Communication Skills to Climb Your Career Ladder, Earn More Money, and Enjoy Your Work**
By Victoria (Vici) Koster-Lenhardt
It's easy to feel stuck in your tech comm career. Vici offers several approaches to "getting unstuck."

19 **Negotiation Skills: The Missing Agreement to Career Advancement**
By Jack Molisani
Jack conducts an overview of workplace negotiation skills and how technical communicators can apply them to advance their careers.

23 **Conducting Informational Interviews**
By Katherine (kit) Brown-Hoekstra
Kit examines the informational interview as an effective strategy for networking and exploring new areas in technical communication.

Cover image VECTOR SPACE/shutterstock.com

25 **GROWing Your Career While Keeping Your Job**
By Ken Schatze
How can you grow your career at your current job? Ken looks at the GROW model for coaching and mentoring and how it can apply to your career.

28 **Purposeful Partnership: Code for America Brigade Chapters as Professional Development Networks for Technical Writers**
By Jasmine R. Amerin and Erica M. Stone
Jasmine and Erica look at Code for America as an untapped professional development resource for technical communicators, which offers them the opportunity to learn new technical and coding skills and network with fellow communicators.

ONLINE ONLY

Would You Mind Looking at This? Five Answers to the Request for Free Labor
By Shelley Thomas

Learning New Skills to Solve Old Problems
By Jeanine Meier

Why Setting Up Personal Career Goals Might Be Counterproductive
Rama Vasudevan

SOCIETY PAGES

32 **STC Announces Most Improved Community and Community of the Year Awards**

32 **2019 STC President's Award**

32 **Share Yourself with *Intercom* Readers**

33 **Peter Morville Named STC's 2019 Honorary Fellow**

COLUMNS

ASK A TECH COMM MANAGER
34 **Transitioning to eLearning, Conducting Informational Interviews, and Professional Development Resources**
By Phylise Banner

HEALTH AND MEDICAL COMMUNICATION
35 **Usability in Contexts of Care**
By Kirk St.Amant

ETHICS
37 **Considering the Axis of Power in Technical Communication**
By Russell Willerton

DEPARTMENTS

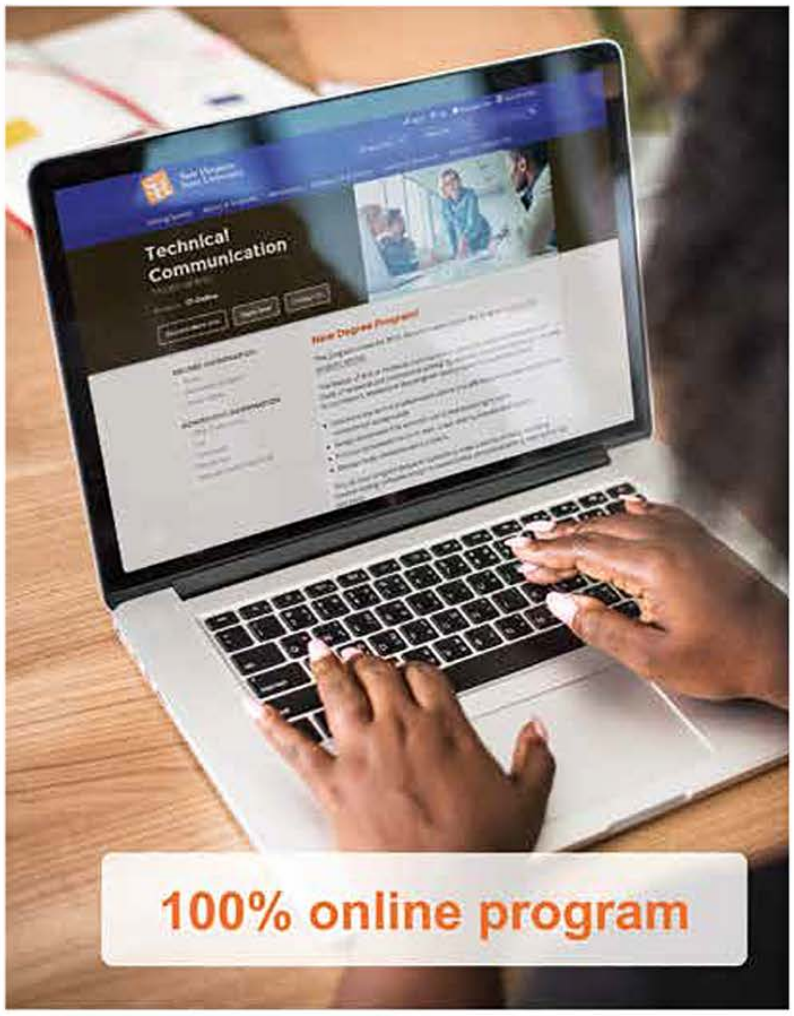
FYI
39 **Mark Your Calendar**
Organization Events Across the Globe

WITFUL THINKING
40 **The Editor's Lot**
By Amanda Lewanski

ADVERTISERS

C2 **Adobe**
3 **Sam Houston State University**
22 **Lavacon**
33, C3 **STC Certification**
36 **STC Membership**
C4 **Writing Assistance, Inc.**

Master of Arts in Technical Communication



Advance Your Career

Apply by August 1 to start in Fall 2019

Scholarships available on a first-come, first-served basis

shsu.edu/techcomm/stc

Sam Houston State University

MEMBER THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

intercom

Intercom, the magazine of the Society for Technical Communication, is published to provide practical examples and applications of technical communication that will promote its readers' professional development.

Publisher Society for Technical Communication
Chief Executive Officer Elizabeth E. (Liz) Pohland
Executive Editor Andrea L. Ames
Assistant Editor James Cameron

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Scott Abel, *Meet the Change Agents*
Thomas Barker, *The Academic Conversation*
Kit Brown-Hoekstra and Cindy Currie, *Ask a Tech Comm Manager*
Cruce Saunders, *Content Engineering*
Michelle Corbin, *Editing Matters*
Jeanette Evans and Charles Dull, *Emerging Technologies*
Mark Lewis, *Metrics*
Alan Porter, *Convergence Conversations*
Kirk St.Amant, *The Cognitive Communicator, Health and Medical Communication*
Ryan Weber, *Student Perspectives*
Russell Willerton, *Ethics*

STC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Officers
Ben Woelk, *President*
Craig Baehr, *Vice President*
Jane Wilson, *Immediate Past President*
James Bousquet, *Treasurer*
Kirsty Taylor, *Secretary*
Directors Bethany Aguad, Alisa Bonsignore, Todd DeLuca, Laura Palmer

EDITORIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Kit Brown-Hoekstra, Chair
Saul Carliner
Michelle Corbin
Michael Opsteegh
Kirk St.Amant

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406
Fairfax, VA 22030
+1(703) 522-4114 | +1(703) 522-2075 fax
Send questions and correspondence to the editor at the above address. General information about STC: stc@stc.org *or* www.stc.org.

Address Changes: membership@stc.org
Intercom Editorial: intercom@stc.org

Reprint Permissions: www.copyright.com
Intercom (ISSN 0164-6206) is published 8 times a year (monthly, except for February, April, June, and August) by the Society for Technical Communication, 3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406, Fairfax, VA 22030, a nonprofit educational organization, as a service to its membership. Membership in STC includes an online subscription to **Intercom**. Periodicals postage paid at Fairfax, VA, and additional offices.
Postmaster Send address changes to **Intercom**, Attn: Membership, c/o Society for Technical Communication, 3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406, Fairfax, VA 22030.
Copyright © 2019 by the Society for Technical Communication. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA. All articles in **Intercom** are copyrighted by the authors unless otherwise indicated. Anyone interested in reprints, reproductions, or reuse must contact the authors for permission. To advertise in **Intercom**, contact *intercom@stc.org*, Society for Technical Communication, 3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406, Fairfax, VA 22030. Ph: +1(703) 522-4114.

A Note from the Editor

IN THE LAST ISSUE (March-April 2019), I confessed to a bias around the theme of content strategy and experience. I stated "the most important thing that content professionals can do is create the right *content experience* … and the only way to do that with high success and excellence is to deliver that content according to the right *content strategy*."

Now I'm going to qualify that statement. I believe that the most important thing that content professionals can do *for their audience* is to create the right content experience through the right content strategy.

Why am I backpedaling? Because I believe that the most important thing that content professionals (or any professional, for that matter) can do *for themselves* is to *develop professionally*. In my mind, that means:

- Being a lifelong learner
- Living a self-examined life—knowing your strengths and what you love, as well as your weaknesses and what you hate
- Thinking consciously and strategically about your industry, your career, and how your career progression affects your life
- Remaining open and coachable
- Proactively seeking out opportunities to learn and create new things
- Actively interacting with others who can hold you accountable, teach you, learn from you, and generally help you move forward in your career and life
- Taking action on what you learn to demonstrate your skills and showcase your results

As a university-level instructor for more than 20 years and a senior leader/mentor/coach in several corporate staff positions for nearly 30 years, I have now built my business on a foundation of professional development. I am confident that this is the greatest tool we, as an industry, have to grow, impact our audiences and our employers or clients, demonstrate our value, increase our personal wealth and satisfaction, and generally live a better life. That probably sounds like a big promise, but it *can* happen—I've not only *seen* it, I've *lived* it.

With that bias in mind, I have assembled a stellar lineup of professional development ideas for you to devour in this jam-packed issue!

First up, Andrew Lawless, a Kolbe certified coach, gives us some great advice about mentors and coaches. His advice about getting the benefits of coaching for low or no financial investment is priceless!

Gabby Pascuzzi, technical writer and *Survivor* contestant, shares her technical communication learnings from the challenges she faced on reality TV through an article based on her 2019 STC Summit Honors Event presentation. This thoughtful and resilient communicator *represented*, and her lessons span day-to-day tech comm, leadership, and life.

Alyssa Fox, past STC President and long-time STC leader and manager of content professionals, provides great advice for career success in your *current* role—in other words, don't wait til you need a new job to develop professionally!

Vici Koster-Lenhardt, another long-time STC leader and career advisor for the United States State Department, tells us how to get unstuck. Feeling like you're in a rut, or don't know what to do next with your career? Check out Vici's article!

Jack Molisani, a recruiter who specializes in technical communication professionals and yet another long-time STC leader, reveals the number one skill his audience feels is needed by all technical communicators *and* tells us how to pick up those crucial skills.

Kit Brown-Hoekstra, past STC President and *another* long-time STC leader, provides a quick and easy way to understand informational interviewing and how it can contribute to career growth and job transitions.

Ken Schatze introduces us to his company's GROW model for developing professionally in your current job—a nicely developed model, explained clearly in this article to make it very simple for you to pick up and use right away!

Jasmine Amerin and Erica Stone, from the University of Missouri – Kansas City, describe a case study of their work with the Code for America brigades and how working with Code for Kansas City is helping a class of technical communicators to build practical technical communication skills and learn while they're doing it!

We had so much great content this month, we didn't have room to print them all. You can find the following articles in the online version of this month's issue.

Shelley Thomas answers a question that I'm sure has plagued many (if not all) of us: Should we review others' documents for free? What do you think? Read Shelley's article to get her thoughtful opinion on the matter.

Jeanine Meier gives us some tips for learning new skills for problem solving.

Rama Vasudevan asks us if goal setting is the best way to grow our careers.

Whew! That's a lot of great stuff! But wait, there's more! We also have three columns for you in this issue:

- Columnists Cindy Currie and Kit Brown-Hoekstra enlist the assistance of Phylise Banner, instructional design expert, to help them answer questions in "Ask a Tech Comm Manager."
- Kirk St.Amant kicks off our new "Health and Medical Communication" column—a *very* timely topic, as healthcare is getting *a lot* of attention right now!
- Russ Willerton explains Ty Herrington's "Axis of Power" model for determining an appropriate course of action when you are faced with an ethical quandry. Thought-provoking *and* practical!

And don't forget to check out the Society pages!

Finally, please engage us in conversation! The feature authors, columnists, and I are devoting our time and effort to create this rich resource for you, and we want you to get as much value from it—and us—as possible! We've provided our email addresses so that you can get in touch. We can also discuss articles and issues with you online, so we hope that you'll ask a question or start or join a conversation!

Here's to your wild success!

— Andrea L. Ames
andrea@idyllpointllc.com

REGISTER FOR UPCOMING ONLINE CERTIFICATE COURSE

TechComm Fundamentals Bootcamp

5 August – 23 September

Mondays | 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM EDT

INSTRUCTOR:
Leah Guren

OVERVIEW:
Kickstart Your TC Career

Technical communication is an exciting and challenging career that offers unlimited opportunity for professional development. But to succeed, it's not enough to learn a desktop publishing or Help authoring tool—you need to master the analysis process. This is a thinking person's dream career!

TechComm Fundamentals Bootcamp is the fastest, most efficient way to jump-start your career in technical communication. It covers key theory that you can immediately apply to your work. It also gives you the skills you need to continue to learn and grow.

Each element of theory is presented with hands-on exercises, real-world examples, and plenty of discussion. The course is sure to leave you feeling enthusiastic and well prepared to get started in the field.

COST:
Members: $595
Nonmembers: $995
Student Members: $295

STC

www.stc.org

Vector Goddess/shutterstock.com

Is That All There Is?

How to Advance in Your Career without Losing Your Mojo

By ANDREW LAWLESS

"I'D RATHER BE WRITING" is a common complaint for those who have taken the path of structured authoring, UX design, information architecture, content strategy, or publication management. The closer they get to the top, the deeper grows their frustration.

Jobs with titles that include the terms *management*, *strategy*, *architecture*, or *design* turn out to be exceptionally hard. The technical aspects of the job descriptions often sound very exciting until job holders are shut down by their own teams, supervisors, or budget cuts.

The world of technical documentation is full of dedicated professionals who want to drive change with the best of intentions—only to get the glare from their own teams. When that happens, it is easy to throw both hands in the air thinking, "What have I gotten myself into?" and "How do I get out?"

How do you avoid reaching the point of your career where you find it unfulfilling?

The "Lawless Rule of Career Diffusion" states that "the closer you get to executive leadership, the further you move away from doing what you love." Ask any CEO. Most find themselves intensely lonely in their jobs. Forty-seven percent state that developing their executive team is difficult. Sixty-one percent are first-timers, and a whopping 79 percent lack the capacity to transform their organization. Only 32 percent feel adequately prepared for the job, while 54 percent say that transitioning to CEO required intense personal reflection (Zehnder 2018).

If you have similar sentiments, you now know that you are not different from the people higher in your organization. We all have the same basic fears:

- I might not be good enough.
- If I fail, I will not be loved, liked, or respected—rejection that might be expressed by getting fired.

Apart from the fact that your CEO may leave with a golden parachute, the difference between you and your CEO can be summarized in one word: coaching.

No CEOs got to where they are without coaching. Bill Gates needed Warren Buffet. Richard Branson couldn't have gotten Virgin Atlantic off the ground without British airline entrepreneur Freddie Laker. Mark Zuckerberg had Steve Jobs to coach him to build a performing team. Oprah Winfrey attributes part of her success to her life coach, Martha Beck.

They all make it clear that coaching is not a luxury; it's a necessity for success. That's why life and business coaching have gone from obscure and complicated a few years ago to something that professionals in technical communication want today. You may think that it's easy to afford coaching on a CEO's pay but not on a technical communicator's salary. Stories of star coaches charging $1 million a year for coaching help to create this myth.

The good news: you can get some of the most effective forms of coaching for free.

Find a mentor. A mentor is someone who has succeeded in your chosen area. It may be an STC Fellow, your boss' boss, or a role model. A mentor is a person who believes in you and genuinely wants you to thrive. They make proactive introductions to connections or present opportunities to you. Their only reward is your success.

Most mentors don't have a certification for coaching, but believing in such an official document is a grave mistake. Being certified merely means a coach has mastered some techniques and tools of coaching. It doesn't necessarily indicate that he or she is skilled at using those tools.

Moreover, competency in coaching doesn't reflect a coach's experience in life or business. Real-life experience and compassion for people in your situation are a *must*, not a *should*. For example, an STC Fellow—schooled in coaching techniques—is a more valuable mentor to a writer than a certified coach lacking technical communication experience.

Build a peer group. We become the people we surround ourselves with. If your peer group is full of over-worked and burned-out technical writers, guess what you become? Over-worked and burned out. So chose your peer group wisely, and be strategic about who you spend your time with.

The peer group environment and habits you build are more potent than your knowledge. The old saying that knowledge is power is a lie. Knowledge is just potential power. *Only knowledge in action has impact*. We all know that one author who knows more about a particular subject than others, but does not get anything written—or at least not on time. Surround yourself with such people, and soon you too will be overwhelmed by your backlog of work. Likewise, become part of a group of highly successful technical documentation professionals, and you get energized by your success.

Most of us do not have the level of clarity we need to get to the next level. That is especially true when we are in a rut or in crisis. All we know is that we have had enough and need a lasting change, not just a break. A group of empowering peers elevates us above the fog.

Model yourself. Observe how your role models work, and do the exact same things. You will get the same results. Often we do not even need a personal hero. If you want to know how to do something, find people who are among the best, and ask them what they do.

Building these coaching capabilities in your life will enable you to work at a higher level than most people. There is a catch: your mentor's best advice will fail, your peer group's well-meant feedback will work against you, and your best modeling will falter if they require you to work against your grain.

Some technical authors are good at studying a vast amount of information and then developing a document strategy. They are naturally born strategizers. Others are overwhelmed by too much detail and are better at seeing the big picture or filling in the gaps. The third group of writers is better at authoring summaries. You cannot be naturally good at everything. The writer who needs a lot of details is typically not so great at leaving out the redundant bits or writing an executive summary.

Some technical writers have a need to stabilize documentation processes that are working well for them, while others are continually looking for improvements and changes that they can make. Neither is good nor bad. For example, if your gut determines your writing process, you may get results faster, but you may miss essential details that will hurt you later. If your head rules, you may lose great opportunities, because it takes you too long to finish your documentation process.

That's where professional coaches come in. They use instruments, such as Kolbe A Index, which measure what you *will* or *won't* do on the job. They give feedback in a way that enables you to naturally act and have clarity on the tasks you absolutely *should* take on and those you should *dump or delegate*.

Coaches help you build a plan for reaching your destiny. Without a defined process and a set of tools that facilitate your journey, your career merely becomes a job and a moderately useful means of making a living. You can quickly fall into the trap of believing that being busy means success. Until you realize that "that is all there is: being busy."

There are plenty of growth opportunities in technical communication. Maybe you start out as a documentation specialist and information developer and continue your career path as an information architect, usability and user experience consultant, or team lead. A prosperous career is non-linear. You may speak a second language, and your company may deem this sufficient qualification to head localization. Who knows?

Whatever you decide, technical communication offers many career advancement possibilities. You can climb any ladder that presents itself. Having a mentor, a peer group, or a life or business coach will support you in picking the one to fulfillment and job satisfaction. i

ANDREW LAWLESS *(*andrew.lawless@rockant.com*) is a Strategic Interventionist who coaches leaders in content industries through implementing critical decisions and managing change. He has transformed content teams in Fortune 1,000 companies, from product development to technical documentation and marketing campaign execution.*

David vs. Goliath: Finding Our Slingshot as Technical Writers

By GABBY PASCUZZI

David versus Goliath: the theme of the 37th season of Survivor, or the perfect metaphor for what it sometimes feels like to be a technical communicator?

Figure 1. Gabby and fellow contestants making a fire.

Editor's note: *If you weren't able to attend the Honors Event at the 2019 STC Summit, you missed an amazing presentation! Gabby Pascuzzi, competitor on the 37th season (which aired in Fall 2018) of* Survivor, *treated us to a view of her time on the show from a very different perspective than what I suspect most viewers take away. Not only inspiring, her story is filled with everyday leadership lessons. I'm thrilled that she agreed to allow us to print an adaptation of the transcript of her talk.*

IN MY EVERYDAY LIFE, I'm a technical writer at Tenable, a cybersecurity company. But in Spring 2018, I temporarily left my desk and flew across the world to be stranded on an island in Fiji alongside 19 strangers. We were to compete on the 37th season of the reality television game *Survivor*. I survived two cyclones, underwent grueling physical and mental challenges, and lived on a diet of only rice and coconuts for 32 of 39 possible days, until I was voted out in 8th place. It was the experience of a lifetime, pushing me far beyond what I thought I was capable of.

The theme of my season was David vs. Goliath. The David tribe was made up of scrappy underdogs who had overcome obstacles in their lives and who were often underestimated by the people around them. The Goliath tribe was made of champions who exuded confidence, seemed to have some sort of inherent advantage in life, and who excelled at pretty much everything they did.

Many of us may aspire to become Goliaths, but I think as technical writers, we all started as Davids, or maybe still consider ourselves Davids—underdogs. Every day in our jobs, we're tackling a different Goliath. The challenge of the day depends; maybe it's the feeling that we need to advocate for ourselves and why our jobs are important, maybe it's being bombarded with a load of information that you need to interpret and sift through, or maybe it's just the myriad of communication challenges that arise in our daily work.

In the biblical story of David versus Goliath, everyone wrote off David and assumed he could never beat Goliath. He was weak and small; people laughed at him and didn't take him seriously. Surprisingly, David *did* have what it took to defeat Goliath. He had a hidden advantage, a skill no one saw, because they underestimated him: he had a slingshot.

Figure 2. Gabby proudly sporting a David tribe buff.

As technical writers, we have an arsenal of slingshots at our disposal. We're adaptable, empathetic, systematic. We're explorers, detectives, good communicators. In *Survivor*, a game about political and social maneuvering—where the key source of currency and power in the game is *information*—good communication skills are a must. Social relationships are the foundation of the game, and you can't have relationships without communication. I felt confident in my communication abilities. But what I also experienced was that the communication issues and problems that face us in our everyday lives are placed under a giant microscope when you're playing a game for a million dollars.

Let's take a look at three challenges we face as technical writers and how those presented themselves to me on *Survivor*, and let's discover how we can find our technical writing slingshot for each situation and use it to defeat that Goliath.

Advocating for Ourselves

As tech writers, we want to feel appreciated and know that our work matters. Sometimes it feels like a Goliath task to advocate for ourselves—what our job is, why we're important, and how we add value to an organization. I was perhaps most excited to represent the field of technical communication, if only so that the eight million *Survivor* viewers across America would see the words "Technical Writer" on screen when I had a confessional (see Figure 3)!

Figure 3. Gabby during a confessional.

One of the biggest challenges I found when starting off my career in technical writing is explaining what my job is to those who are unfamiliar with the field. I found myself explaining what a technical writer was *ad nauseum*—during the casting process, in confessionals with the producers, and to my fellow tribemates.

On the first day of the game, we split into our tribe camps and began introducing ourselves to our new tribemates. We went around in a circle, saying our name and occupation.

The man before me introduced himself as a robotics engineer. Everyone was very impressed, including me. Then, it was my turn.

"My name is Gabby, and I'm a technical writer."

I braced myself for the usual, "*What does that mean?*"

Instead, I saw a hand, extended in front of me. It was the robotics engineer. He shook my hand and said, "Thank you for your service."

Not surprisingly, he ended up becoming my closest ally in the game. A subject matter expert who is appreciative of the work we do has a special place in my heart.

Just like I needed an ally on *Survivor*, we need allies in our jobs. Technical writers are skilled at making cross-discipline connections. Our slingshot is that *we're good at establishing relationships with the people that we need to*: project managers, engineers, developers, marketing. Tech writers are some of the most well-connected people at an organization. The better we foster relationships with people, the more allies we have and the more we make ourselves and our worth known. We cannot do our job alone, but we're just as important as an ally to others as they are to us. When we have good alliances, people recognize and appreciate the work that we do.

Synthesizing Information

What about when there's a huge amount of information, and it's your job to synthesize and process all of it to create something digestible? When we receive information from so many different sources, it can feel overwhelming figuring out where to begin.

Survivor was the perfect metaphor for this influx of information. You are learning as you go, based on day-to-day information you learn from your allies, your adversaries, and tribal council. There was no pre-written procedure for how to play the game.

If there was a step-by-step instruction guide on how to win *Survivor*, no one would watch the show. It would be the same show year after year. The joy of the game is that there's not one way to win, not one set of foolproof directives that work every time. That is why the show has been on for 18 years—which always surprises people, whose first question to me is often, "That show's still on?"

Instead, the information I had about *Survivor* was more like general concept material, or the general structure of the game: every three days or so, someone gets voted off the island. The goal of the game is simple: don't get voted out. The steps to achieving that goal, however, you had to write yourself. The information you needed to reach that goal, you had to discover and make sense of on your own.

The technical writer's slingshot is *our ability to sift through a lot of information and figure out what's important and what's not*. Our skillset is so much broader than just writing. We're not just writers: we're researchers, explorers, detectives. We gather data, and we decide what needs to be done with it. We're analysts and learners, not only of technical information, but of human nature and psychology.

Overcoming Communication Obstacles

The last challenge is the culmination of the previous two: we've proven why our role is important, and we spent the effort processing the input. Now we need to navigate writing and communication obstacles and find a way to portray the information clearly to others. Just like I had to work with people from different walks of life on *Survivor*, as technical writers we have to communicate with all types of people, including non-technical people and people who aren't writers themselves. And often on a deadline! Sometimes the Goliath task can be just doing the actual work!

My communication skills would be put to the test in one of the biggest challenges we played on *Survivor*. My tribemates were blindfolded and had to navigate me through an obstacle course (see Figure 4), and then I had to direct more blindfolded tribemates to guide a ball through a table maze (see Figure 5). Not only would the quality of my instructions matter, but also my ability to empathize with the people I was instructing. We always have to put ourselves in the shoes of our users, and in this case my users were people who couldn't see where they were going. And of course, we were doing it all on a deadline—we had to beat the other teams.

Figure 4. Gabby guiding teammates through the obstacle course.

Figure 5. Gabby guiding teammates through the obstacle course.

But if there's any Goliath that tech writers are equipped to handle, it's a communication challenge. In the game, this challenge was a do-or-die moment. We had just swapped to new tribes, and I was in the minority. If my tribe lost, I was getting voted out that night.

I guided my tribemates through the physical obstacles, just like I maneuver communication obstacles every day. I employed all my communication slingshots: empathy, precision, concision, patience, and persistence. And it paid off. My tribe came in first, winning ourselves immunity from being voted out, as well as a tray of cinnamon rolls and pastries—much needed sustenance after ten days of starvation. While I might have been, physically, the smallest and weakest on my tribe, that day my communication skills were the slingshot that led us to victory (see Figure 6)!

Figure 6. Gabby's team winning the challenge after she guided teammates through the table maze.

Yes, it helped to have two big, strong guys carrying me, but that's like having a solid product to write about! The foundation and the bells and whistles are there, but it's us, the communicators, who elevate and support the rest of the team's efforts.

Figure 7. Gabby staking the fire at camp as a pot of rice cooks.

Figure 8. Gabby and Christian Hubicki, her robotics engineer ally, gathering firewood.

Finding Your Slingshot

The skills we have as technical writers help us in our jobs, in our day-to-day lives, and in situations you'd never expect … like trying to survive on a deserted island in a crazy game for a million dollars. As technical writers, we might often feel like we are David against Goliath, and others might view us as the underdog. But the thing about underdogs is this: we're scrappy. We're resourceful. We're smart. We have a slew of hidden advantages. When we advocate for why our work is important, create allies along the way, and put on our detective hats, we can navigate any communication obstacle with ease. And good communication is a handy slingshot to have in any business, personal, or competitive context.

After surviving *Survivor*, I realized something: though others did underestimate me, the person most guilty of underestimating me was *myself*. I proved I have what it takes to make it: sleeping in the rain, not eating for days, clawing my way back from the bottom of a tribe. I was tougher than I ever knew, and I had only been doing myself a disservice by underestimating myself.

As technical writers, when we band together as a tribe, we help each other find our slingshots. We shouldn't underestimate ourselves and neither should others, because maybe we are all a little more Goliath than we thought.

GABBY PASCUZZI (gspascuzzi@gmail.com) *is a Technical Writer at Tenable, the cyber exposure company. She writes user documentation for Nessus, an industry-standard vulnerability assessment solution, and for Tenable.io, part of the Tenable Cyber Exposure Platform. She is passionate about writing with clarity, empathy, and cross-cultural sensitivity. In Fall 2018, Gabby was a contestant on CBS's 37th season of* Survivor: David vs. Goliath. *As a communication specialist, Gabby savored the opportunity to maneuver the social and strategic mechanics of the game. She survived challenges both physical and mental; from a cyclone hitting the island to living with, and attempting to outlast, 19 people from different walks of life.*

Professional Development with Purpose: Career Success in Your Current Role

By ALYSSA FOX | *STC Senior Member*

fizkes/shutterstock.com

DEVELOPING YOURSELF PROFESSIONALLY is an important endeavor to make you marketable in today's work environment. Knowing your strengths and capabilities is essential to planning for a career that thrives.

A vast number of professionals think that developing their careers is the responsibility of the organizations for which they work. On the flip side, according to a joint research study conducted by EdAssist and the University of Phoenix on employees' and managers' perceptions of career development, "98 percent [of managers] say workers should continually update and improve their skills, 85 percent say they should identify job opportunities and career paths, and 80 percent say they should be responsible for building their job-hunting and career-planning skills." So who's right?

Ultimately, you're the one who knows what you want to do, where you want your career to go, and how you'd like to get there. Your employer should absolutely play a part in that, but *you* should be driving your professional development. How much thought are you putting into your career strategy?

Owning your career path takes an investment of time, energy, and, yes, money. There are numerous free or inexpensive learning opportunities available, but some larger learning options might cost more. They ultimately pay for themselves, however, in increased earning power, up-to-date skills, and satisfaction that comes from personal growth. Frequently, professionals are unwilling to pay for their own career growth, which I find puzzling. If you're unwilling to invest in yourself, why should someone else?

Though I firmly advocate that you drive your own career, there are a few ways your organization can support you in your professional development. For conferences, they can pay for all or part of your registration and travel costs, or they can give you time off so you don't have to dip into your vacation time to attend. They can pay the registration fee for a webinar or online course for you or your team. They can support you in internal initiatives that let you try new ways of doing things, such as book clubs or pilot projects that improve the team's communication or collaboration. It never hurts to ask your manager to see how the company can help you and your team continue to enhance your skills.

Advantages to Your Company

While career development benefits you directly, there are numerous advantages to organizations when their employees continually learn. Use these points in discussion with your employer to persuade them to assist you in your career development.

Company Recognition and Reputation

Employees are the outward face of a company. Depending on the type of professional development you engage in, your company can gain recognition and a good reputation throughout the industry. For example, public speaking at industry events and conferences puts your company's name out there prominently as you participate in those events, increasing visibility and reputation for prospective employees.

Increased Collective Knowledge of Team

Participating in training and further education in relevant subjects and tools can have an immediate impact on productivity. When you learn a new process, approach, or application, you generally want to start using it as soon as possible. Also, once one or two employees on a team learn something new, they can spread the knowledge among their team members through learning sessions, and the whole team benefits.

> "The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay."
>
> –Henry Ford

Increased Morale

As employees start to employ updated practices and tools, the faster and more effective results increase their confidence. Their job satisfaction expands as they are able to produce more and be more efficient across the board. Additionally, investment in employees makes them feel valued, increasing their loyalty.

Employee Retention and Recruiting

Employees want to feel like they're making a difference and not becoming stagnant in their skills. If they don't feel challenged, they'll start looking for opportunities elsewhere. Continuous learning keeps employees engaged in their work, and it helps to retain employees when they know they'll be supported in increasing their skillsets.

When job searching, you should also look at professional development support as a benefit in the mix when considering an offer. If there's no discussion during interviews of how an organization can help you expand your career while working there, it's likely you'll find better support and learning opportunities at another company.

Advantages to You

Not investing in your career can put you five, ten, or twenty years down the road, waking up, and asking yourself, "How'd I get here, and where am I going?" There are several reasons you should make a proactive plan for achieving your professional goals.

Improved Skillset

Growing in your current position offers a wealth of benefits that help you become more efficient and more effective. Learning new ways to do things or new tools to do them with prevents stagnation in your role and career, and stretches you beyond your comfort zone. If you continue to do the same thing over and over without expanding your knowledge, your skillset becomes rusty and your value is diminished when compared to someone keeping up with modern methods—both within your company and in your chosen line of work. Finally, continuing to improve yourself contributes to becoming a top performer, which can protect you if potential layoffs arise, when lower performers are often the first to be cut.

> "Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to."
>
> –Richard Branson

Promotion Potential

When managers are considering who to promote on their teams, they're often looking at people who are learning new things, helping the team advance in methods and ideas, and setting an example for improved personal productivity. Managers need to encourage their team members to develop themselves, so they should participate in professional development as an example to their team. Even if you're not looking to be promoted into a managerial position, showing you're invested in increasing your knowledge makes you a much more attractive candidate for promotion than someone who does little beyond the bare minimum.

Personal Satisfaction

According to a recent Gallup study (Mann & Harter), only 13 percent of employees worldwide are engaged in their jobs. Outdated approaches, repetitive work, and lack of learning all contribute to this disengagement. The better you are at your job, the more confident you feel in your abilities and willingness to try new things. If you don't feel like you're capable of performing your job duties and performing them well, some additional training or assistance can go a long way in building confidence in yourself. Once your faith in yourself is more evident, your employer will trust you more as well.

Interesting Internal Projects

Working in the same way for a long time can lead to lackluster and unimaginative results. Professional training can kickstart your creativity and give you a myriad of ideas for improving and trying out things at your job. If you show an interest in trying new things and working on different initiatives, it's likely you'll be selected for interesting projects or committees within your organization. Even better, start your own! These projects can put you in touch with people you wouldn't normally work with on a day-to-day basis, expanding your professional network, as well.

Enhanced Reputation

As you continue to build your skillset and initiate improvements across your company, you'll start to be recognized as someone who's a team player and who's interested in achieving more. People will involve you in their projects and seek your opinion on significant efforts. Increased visibility and a positive reputation lead to more opportunities across your company—from the promotion potential already discussed to more easily paving the way for trying new roles or a career change.

Professional Development Opportunities

There are numerous ways to continue to grow your career, both inside and outside of your company. Here are some examples.

Inside your company, look for little ways to expand your role and visibility.

- Make presentations to your manager, team, or a larger group to enhance your public speaking skills and demonstrate your knowledge about a topic.
- Initiate or participate in groups or projects to improve or change a process or evaluate a tool.
- Cultivate a mentor in your company to give you insight into how other groups work, gain a chance to learn leadership tips, and help you determine your career path.
- Write for a company blog or internal newsletter to gain visibility and sharpen your writing skills.

Externally, the range of learning opportunities is even broader.

- Conferences are multi-day immersive experiences that are packed full of keynote and informational sessions and abound for practically any industry. With travel and registration costs added in, conferences are a more significant investment, but your company could assist you with this, and these events often provide the most reward.
- Webinars and online courses are a less expensive and time-intensive method of learning new tools, brushing up on current skills, and exploring new ideas.
- External mentors give you perspective on how things happen in other organizations and in other industries.
- Joining and volunteering for a professional organization that aligns with your professional interests also provides multiple chances for expanding your skill set in a relatively risk-free way. You'll also receive valuable networking connections through professional organizations, which you can also foster through meetups and online communities. The broader and larger your network is, the more links you have who can help when you run into an issue, need advice, or are looking for a new job.
- Reading is a simple, free or very low cost way to learn about relevant topics in your industry—books, blogs, industry magazines, and social media posts are all readily available and chock full of valuable information.
- More formal education options, such as certificate programs through a school or university, a certification program offered by a professional organization, or a degree from a school or university are also available. While likely the most expensive choice, they're also the most comprehensive and in-depth. Many companies offer tuition reimbursement for programs like these, so check with your HR department if you're interested.

In a hyper-competitive business world where companies are doing less with more, the importance of being up to date with your skills and technologies is increasingly important. Professionals who invest in themselves stand head and shoulders above less-motivated employees and snag the best positions at organizations who support their employees in multiple ways. Great careers don't happen by accident, so make a plan, seek out opportunities to learn, and watch your career capital skyrocket.

ALYSSA FOX (alyssafoxstc@gmail.com) *is a content strategist and marketing leader who thrives on improving customer experience through brand consistency and relevant information. She's a champion for cultures that position content to drive leads, revenue, and customer retention. Alyssa has vast management experience across global teams and has worked on numerous cross-functional initiatives to improve processes and communication across organizations.*

RESOURCE

Mann, Annamarie, and Jim Harter. "The Worldwide Employee Engagement Crisis." *Gallup Workplace. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236495/worldwide-employee-engagement-crisis.aspx*

Getting Unstuck:

pathdoc/shutterstock.com

Repurposing Your Technical Communication Skills to Climb Your Career Ladder, Earn More Money, and Enjoy Your Work

By VICTORIA (VICI) KOSTER-LENHARDT | *STC Fellow*

"I'M STUCK!"

At least once in your working life, you will think "I'm stuck!" or say it out loud to a friend or a career counselor. You might even say it to a stranger. Getting stuck, along with becoming bored or complacent, is not necessarily negative. It can often reflect a point of mastery, comfort, and success. No matter the reason, there is no need to waste time and energy on figuring out why you are stuck. Instead, there is a simple combination of exercises you can use to identify what you enjoy doing most, what you do well, and what you want to improve.

By working through these three "whats," you will uncover opportunities you never thought of, ideas you have only half-heartedly considered, and nuggets of genius that will get you unstuck quicker than you think. In fact, you can do the first exercise in the amount of time it takes you to read this article.

Approaches to Getting Unstuck

Take the first step toward getting unstuck by analyzing the work you have done in the past. There are two approaches. The first approach uses your résumé; the second approach requires you to write a short story about your greatest accomplishment in the past five years.

Approach #1: The Résumé

Find a recent version of your résumé and print it out. First, read through your résumé, underline the words and phrases of the work you enjoyed doing. Second, circle the words and phrases of the work you did well; these might overlap with the work you enjoyed, but they might not. Third, draw a star next to the words and phrases of work you would like to do more of in the future. Finally, take a highlighter and mark words and phrases that indicate skills you would like to improve.

When you complete this exercise, you will have a set of words that you can further use to search job ads and discover jobs you had not previously considered. You can also use the words to create an "elevator pitch" to use with family, friends, colleagues, and strangers to explore options, ask for help, and build your personal job search ambassadors. Highlighted text will provide ideas for courses and certifications you might want to consider to address key skills you need to be hired or promoted.

Approach #2: Your Success Story

Find 15 minutes in your day to think about your greatest accomplishment in the past five years. Was there something you are particularly proud of accomplishing? Completing? Starting? Changing? Overcoming? Ask your closest friends, family members, and colleagues what they think. It does not have to be work related.

Why five years? Because this is enough time to have done something you are proud of while being recent enough that your skills are still current. You might think of something that you did ten years ago or more, but keep it within five years, if you can. Then, grab a blank sheet of paper and your favorite pen. Write your story in four paragraphs. *Do not type it on a device.*

In the first paragraph, explain the background of the situation or the context in which you approached the challenge. In the second paragraph, write about the challenge you faced. Explain *why* it was a challenge. The more detail the better. In the third paragraph, write how you addressed the challenge. Describe what you actually did. In the fourth paragraph, write the results you achieved, including any awards or accolades you received. Some readers might be thinking at this point, "Oh, this is the STAR method. I'm familiar with this." That's true. "S" for "situation," "T" for "task," "A" for "actions," and "R" for "results." Usually this method is used for developing answers for interviews. However, it is also a very good tool for writing an accomplishment. But let's take it one step further.

When you have the story written down, brainstorm a bullet list of all the skills you used. That is why I call it the "STAR(s)" method. The second "S" is for "skills."

Now, do the underline-circle-star-highlighter analysis described in the first approach. Are you seeing a pattern yet?

What Are the Current Market Needs?

A third component of this analysis phase uses actual job advertisements. After you have analyzed your résumé and greatest accomplishment story, go to your preferred job board or job search website. Using the words you highlighted in the first two exercises, select two jobs that, all things being equal, you would like to submit an application for today. Print them out and grab a yellow, a pink, and a blue highlighter.

With the yellow highlighter, mark the words and phrases that attract you to the job. With the pink highlighter, mark the requirements you meet. With the blue highlighter, mark the requirements you do not meet. Now you know whether or not you are a good candidate and what you need to improve (through learning or gaining hands-on experience) to become the ideal candidate. You will also learn terminology to weave into your elevator pitch.

Designing Your Professional Development Strategy

Armed with the thought work of these three exercises, you will have a vision that is focused on what you enjoy doing and want to do more of in the future. You will not only have details about what you *want* to improve, you will also have ideas for your unique professional development needs based on what the current job market is demanding in terms of skills, knowledge, and experience.

Depending on your budget, you can explore the following professional development options. They are listed from low to high risk based on time and financial investment.

- **Targeted volunteering.** If you have some free time and are not in a hurry, targeted volunteering will allow you to try out the skills you want to develop. What separates "targeted volunteering" from "volunteering" is that you seek out volunteer opportunities that allow you to gain hands-on experience of the knowledge and skills you identified during the analysis of your résumé, story, and job advertisements. If you do not like the work, it is relatively easy to step away from the volunteer gig and try something else.
- **Online courses, both free and for a fee.** These are generally low-cost. You gain knowledge and skills by being taught a structured curriculum. This option is a nice complement to the targeted volunteering and could be all that you need to grow.
- **Professional certification.** Signing up for a professional certification is an excellent choice if you have already decided to change careers or are clear about the promotion you want. It demonstrates to future employers or your current company a higher commitment to your professional development. It is also a good first step for trying something new, expanding your connections, and meeting movers and shakers in the industry while investing roughly $500 to $5,000. The time involved will depend on the certification, so you will need to shop around to find the one that best fits your plans and budget.
- **A degree program.** Going back to school is a bigger investment of time and money compared to the first three options. In some industries, companies, and organizations, a degree could be a key requirement. Making this decision will depend on how passionate you are about your long-term plans and expectations for earning a higher salary. Be sure to gather research through informational conversation as input to making this decision. You might have all the knowledge and experience that you need, which hiring managers and recruiters will be able to tell you. You might find that a degree will not make a significant impact on your employability or that it will be the primary path to landing your dream job.

The Transferable Skills of Technical Communicators

I have built a long and lucrative career based on my writing and editing skills and experience. Over the past 30+ years, I have observed a number of transferable skills that typical technical communicators gain within as little as five years of working in this industry. Of course, the longer you work in the industry, the more skills you gain. If you read the last eight *Intercom* magazines, you will immediately find ideas for careers that use your technical communication background. These include strategic management, organizational development, business analysis, teaching, marketing, usability, event planning, content management, entrepreneurship, governance, project management, program management, business development, human resources, recruiting, and public speaking. I've witnessed technical communicators—*STCers*—transition into all of these fields. Each of these industries has its own skillset that you have likely dabbled in or developed in-depth during your career so far. Your analysis will point you in the right direction.

Get Ready to Open Yourself to New Opportunities

Use the exercises described in this article to understand your unique skillset, determine what type of job you would like to do now and in the future, and create and execute a strategy for closing your knowledge, experience, and skill gaps. You will quickly become unstuck and begin moving forward with confidence toward paid employment that you enjoy. You might even land your dream job … overseas.

After a 21-year career in various communications roles at The Coca-Cola Company, VICI KOSTER-LENHARDT (vkosterlenhardt@gmail.com) *moved out of the private IT sector and transitioned into job search and career coaching in the public sector. Today, she provides these services to spouses of U.S. diplomats working in Central and Eastern Europe. Vici is an STC Fellow and lives in Vienna, Austria. You can learn more about her at* www.linkedin.com/in/vkosterlenhardt.

VectorMine/shutterstock.com

Negotiation Skills: The Missing Ingredient to Career Advancement

By JACK MOLISANI | *STC Fellow*

WHEN ANDREA AMES approached me to write an article on the impact of professional development on career advancement, my first thought was to update my research on which tools and technologies are most requested in content-related job postings (Molisani 2015). But Saul Carliner and Yuan Chen did such a great job presenting the results of the technical communication census (2018), I decided to forgo tools and focus on what "soft skills" content professionals need to advance their careers.

To gather data, I posted the following survey question on content-related groups on Facebook and LinkedIn: what soft skills do content professionals need to be successful?

I received a wide range of answers, so I searched for commonalities in the responses and grouped similar answers together. For example, we grouped the following answers under the common heading "Workplace Negotiation Skills":

- Negotiation
- Diplomacy
- Conflict resolution
- Finding common ground
- Managing project scope

Granted, each of the above is a skill unto itself, but we did our best to look for the commonalities in the survey answers.

There were almost 100 different answers (even with grouping), but some answers were more common than most. Here are the top ten:

- Workplace negotiation skills
- Listening skills
- Empathy
- Leadership
- Vision
- Curiosity
- Flexibility
- Patience
- Self-awareness
- Relationship to management

I have to admit I didn't expect to see some of the answers (patience, self-awareness), but most people might expect to see the top four: negotiation, listening, empathy, and leadership.

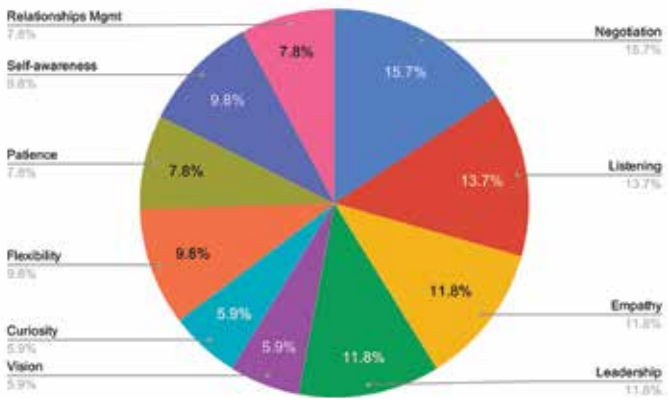


Figure 1. Top 10 responses to informal Facebook and LinkedIn survey.

It is interesting to note how closely related those last four skills are: you must have listening end empathy skills to be a good negotiator, be a good negotiator to be a good leader, etc.

While many of the above skills cannot be taught in an article (for example, empathy, curiosity), the top answer (negotiation skills) certainly can.

Let's look at what negotiation is and how you can use it to advance your content career.

What Is Negotiation?

For many people, the term "negotiating" brings to mind unpleasant haggling with a used car salesperson. But negotiating isn't something you do just when buying a large-ticket item like a washing machine or a car. Deciding what features will be documented given the time on hand, getting your kids to clean their rooms before playing video games, even deciding what movie to watch on date night—all of these involve negotiating in one form or another.

Common definitions of "negotiating" include:

- *To attempt to come to an agreement on something through discussion and compromise (*Dictionary.com*).*
- *The process of achieving agreement through discussion (*Wiktionary.com*).*
- *Conferring, discussing, or bargaining to reach agreement (*Webster's Dictionary*).*

Note that all three definitions include "agreement." More on this in a bit.

Next, let's look at the derivation: Latin *negotiatus*, past participle of *negotiari*, "carry on business, do business." So negotiation is just part and parcel of doing business! Interesting, huh?

A Better Definition

After 35 years of conducting workplace negotiations (first as a Systems Acquisition Officer in the Space Division of USAF, then as a staff and contract technical writer, and finally as the owner of my own business), I find the above definitions lacking—they just don't capture the true spirit and goal of negotiation. So I created my own definition:

> Negotiation is the art of giving up as little as possible of what you have in order to get what you want.

For what would you (a staff or contract content professional) be negotiating?

- Your compensation
- Project scope
- Project deadlines
- Resources
- Headcount
- Comp time

- Training
- Authoring tools

What do you regularly give up in order to get what you want in the workplace? Most often it is your free time (deadlines!), money, or job security (if there *is* such a thing anymore). So negotiation really is the art of giving up as little as possible of what you have in order to get what you want.

Let's look at where to start.

Negotiation Basics

One negotiates to reach a common agreement. I believe all negotiations have to be either *win-win* or *lose-lose* to be considered successful. For example:

A sale: the buyer gets a product (or service) they wanted at a price they can afford, and the seller make a reasonable profit.

A war: both factions split the territory in dispute. Neither side is happy, but it's certainly better than wholesale killing.

Win-lose is not "negotiating." When one side *forces* their terms on the other, there is no common agreement, no meeting in the middle. The other party may accept the offer because they have to, but they sure aren't going to like it, and they certainly are not going to give 100% if they feel they have been cheated.

What do you think a vendor will do if he sold his service for less than what he considers a fair price?

What do you think an employee will do if she accepts a salary that is much lower than what she thinks is fair?

The Negotiation

Let's look at some best practices for conducting negotiations.

Before You Begin

Before starting any negotiation, do your homework. Decide before you begin what you would like to achieve. Decide what is a nice-to-have, what is a must-have, and at what point will you walk away from the negotiation if you are just not getting what you want.

Note: Don't try to decide these things *during* the negotiation! There is usually far too much stress or emotion in a negotiation, and you don't want to make a snap decision that you will later regret.

Chellie Campbell talks about doing business with "Your People" (2016). You recognize Your People when you meet them. They value your services and are happy to pay your rates for a quality product or service. They *want* to strike a deal that is good for both parties.

So the next step after doing your homework is to find Your People and negotiate with them.

At the Start

When opening a negotiation, don't start by talking about money. Take time to get to know the person with whom you are negotiating and let them get to know you. They will be more open to negotiating if they feel you are "birds of a feather," so look for shared values and common ground.

Also find out what is important to them, and let them know what is important to you (more on this later).

Opening Offers: Theirs

When possible, let the other side make the opening offer. That is the first insight you get into what they have in mind as a fair price, and you can determine if the deal is even worth pursuing.

For example, I own a technical staffing company. When a company comes to me looking for a contract technical writer, I usually say: "Compensations can vary widely based on the amount of education and experience they have. Do you have a particular range in mind, so I don't send anyone too expensive?"

Sometimes a client tells me they want someone for a ridiculously low amount. In that case I don't even try to negotiate. I just say, "I'm sorry, there is just no way to find someone with the skills and experience you need at that bill rate."

But if the number is reasonable, I can ask to split the difference or even just agree to their number if it is not too far from what I think it should be.

Opening Offers: Yours

There will be times when you will have to make the opening offer, such as stating your bill rate or salary expectations in an interview. I have a rule of thumb: The better the interview went, the higher the number I quote when they asked my bill rate.

However, I always add a qualifier in case I need to back-peddle. I say, "My *normal* bill rate is $x/hr…" and then watch their reaction. If they accept my rate without hesitation, I make a mental note to raise my rate! But, if they react negatively, I can quickly add something like, "***but*** … I'm flexible given that this is a long-term contract [given the state of the economy, etc.]."

If they react negatively to my opening offer and I have to back-peddle, I also ask, "What bill rate did you have in mind?" That, too, gives insight into what they are expecting to pay and whether the deal is salvageable (that is, continue to negotiate or just walk away).

Justifying Your Numbers

When bidding projects (regardless of whether you are an internal employee or external contractor), you must be able to show how you came up with your estimate.

The best way is to support your numbers with historical data. "The last time we did a project just like this it took…." If you can show exactly how you came up with your

numbers, the negotiation will swing away from your hourly rate and onto the scope of the project.

Negotiating: Give and Take

Remember, most people consider making and receiving concessions as part of the negotiation process. Knowing that the other person expects me to give up something as part of the negotiation, I always add things to my "wish list" that I am willing to negotiate away.

I always ask the other party what is important to them at the start of the negotiation. That way I can say if you give me what is important to me, I'll do what I can to give you what is important to you. When I do that, I find negotiating a deal is much closer to a dance than a tug-of-war. When you come to a common agreement, you have a deal.

To recap:

- Negotiation is the art of giving up as little of what you have in order to get what you want.
- Find and negotiate with Your People.
- Take time to build rapport with the other party.
- Decide before you start what you want, what you are willing to give up, and when to walk away.
- When possible let the other party make the opening offer.
- Be able to back up your numbers and estimates.
- Negotiate to a common agreement.
- Go for a Win-Win.

JACK MOLISANI (JackMolisani@ProspringStaffing.com) *is an STC Fellow and President of ProSpring Technical Staffing, an agency specializing in staff and contract content professionals* (www.ProspringStaffing.com). *He produces the LavaCon Conference on Content Strategy and Technical Communication Management* (www.lavacon.org), *and he is the author of* Be the Captain of Your Career: A New Approach to Career Planning and Advancement, *which hit #5 on Amazon's Career and Résumé Bestseller list. You can Follow Jack on Twitter at* http://www.twitter.com/JackMolisani.

RESOURCES

Campbell, Chellie. *Zero to Zillionaire.* Sourcebooks: Naperville, IL, 2006.

Carliner, Saul and Yuan Chen. "The State of the Technical Communication Industry," *Intercom* 65.8 (2018).

Molisani, Jack. "The United Nations of Content," *Intercom* 62.10 (2015).

Molisani, Jack, and Kit Brown-Hoekstra. "Honing Your Workplace Negotiation Skills," STC webinar. *https://www.stc.org/event/honing-your-workplace-negotiation-skills/*

Molisani, Jack, and Bonnie Graham. "How to Build a Business Case," *Intercom* 55.6 (2008).

Enhance Your Skills.
Find Your Tribe.
Make a Difference.
The LavaCon Conference
Creating Unified Content Experiences
LavaCon is a conference for content strategists, documentation managers, and other content professionals.
Our 2019 program includes senior strategists from Amazon, Salesforce, Microsoft, Intel, Adobe, and more.
October 27–30, 2019 Portland, Oregon lavacon.org

Conducting Informational Interviews

By KATHERINE (KIT) BROWN-HOEKSTRA | *STC Fellow*

one line man/shutterstock.com

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS are an under-utilized but effective strategy for networking and for exploring areas of technical communication into which you want to expand. You can use an informational interview at any point in your career.

With an informational interview, you get to put your journalism skills to work. Unlike a job interview, you are the one asking most of the questions. Your goal is to come out of the interview with a deeper understanding of the area you are researching and the person you are interviewing. You also want to end the interview by getting additional names of people to talk to and at least one resource for further research.

Here are the steps you need to take:

1. Identify an area you want to learn more about (subject area, company, job, etc.)
2. Review your network to find three people who are experts in the area in which you are interested.
3. Set up the interviews.
4. Prepare for the interviews.
5. Conduct the interviews.
6. Thank the people for their time.

Identify an Area You Are Interested In

Do you want to change industries? Are you thinking about joining a startup or becoming a consultant? Do you want to leverage your skills in a different area of technical communication and aren't sure how to get there (e.g., e-learning, content strategy, project management, team management, or usability research)?

An informational interview can help you decide if the change is right for you. In addition, your interviewee can often provide insight into how you should re-structure your résumé, tell you what keywords are important, and what skills to emphasize.

Once you know what you are interested in learning about, poke around on the Internet, read some books or articles, and identify people whose names appear frequently in association with the topic. This preliminary research will help you clarify your questions and refine your list of people to talk to.

Review Your Network

Chances are good that someone in your network either has expertise in the area you are interested in or knows

someone who does. If you don't know the person personally, but someone in your network does, ask for an introduction. Don't be shy! Most people in our profession are very open and willing to share their knowledge. If they can't help, ask them to point you to someone who might be able to.

Here's a sample email:

> Dear _____,
>
> My colleague, _____, suggested that I contact you about some research I'm conducting on _____.
>
> [if in person] I would love to buy you lunch or coffee and learn more about your expertise in _____. When would be a good time?
>
> [if on the phone] I would appreciate it if we could have a conference call to talk about _____. When would be a good time?
>
> Thanks in advance for your help!
>
> Regards,
> [Your Name]
> [your contact info]

Schedule the Interviews

Depending on whether you are meeting by phone or in person, you need to think about different things:

- If you are meeting in person, pick a restaurant or coffee shop convenient for them. Find somewhere that is relatively quiet and distraction-free. Arrive a few minutes early.
- If meeting on the phone, be sure to find out their time zone and accommodate it. Make sure that you arrive to the call a few minutes early.

Prepare for the Interviews

During your initial research, you probably identified some questions you have about your topic. Now, you need to refine them so that they fit with your interviewee's particular skills or experiences. The better your questions, the better the information and responses you will get, so take some time to really think about the question. *A More Beautiful Question* by Warren Berger talks about the importance of asking the right questions in the right way.

Write down your questions so that you can be sure to cover everything during the interviews.

Conduct the Interviews

Remember, most people love talking about what they do and about their experiences. Be prepared to listen and to take notes. Ask if you can record it so you can go back later if you need to (unless you are asking people to talk about their companies or about competitors).

Take (or send) your résumé. Depending on the topic you are discussing, you can often get feedback from the interviewee. In most cases, the people you are interviewing don't currently have jobs available in the area you are researching, but if you make a good impression, they might remember you later.

For example, early in my career, I conducted an informational interview with someone who worked at a medical device manufacturer. It sounded like my dream job, where I could use both my medical background and my master's degree in technical communication. A year later, he called and said that he finally had budget to hire me and asked if I still interested. I jumped at the chance, doubled my salary from the temp job I was working, and ended up working there for almost five years.

During the interviews, keep the following things in mind:

- Keep it positive.
- Ask questions that encourage a more detailed answer. (Avoid Yes/No questions.)
- Pause for 20 or 30 seconds after they seem to be done talking. People often think of more to say if you give them a little space.
- Ask follow-up questions.
- Don't be afraid to go off script. You don't have to ask all of the questions you prepared. Sometimes, you go in thinking you will learn one thing and discover something else. That's OK.
- End on time. Be respectful of the other person's time.
- Ask for three names to follow up with. Ask if you can use their name when introducing yourself.
- Ask for two resources that you can explore for more information.
- Ask if you can add them to your network.

Say Thank You

Always send a thank-you note to the person after the meeting. In the note, mention at least one thing that was helpful to you.

In addition, follow up with them periodically and let them know how you are doing and how you connected with their contacts. They invested some time in you.

Look for a way you can return the favor. Often, these end up being a "pay it forward" kind of thing rather than a straight transaction. That is OK. Many people who like mentoring do it because others mentored them when they were starting out or shifting gears.

Go forth and connect!

KIT BROWN-HOEKSTRA *(*kitbh.stc@gmail.com*) is an STC Fellow and past president, and award-winning consultant. As Principal of Comgenesis, LLC, Kit works in the space between tech comm and localization to help her clients create effective content strategies for their global customers. She speaks at conferences worldwide and publishes regularly in industry magazines. She recently edited* The Language of Localization. *Her blog is* www.pangaeapapers.com.

GROWing Your Career While Keeping Your Job

By KEN SCHATZE | *STC Senior Member*

faithie/shutterstock.com

WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING for work, you pay a lot of attention to professional development. You attend courses, you keep your LinkedIn profile up-to-date, and you create a portfolio to showcase the best of what you can do.

Once you've found a job, do you keep up these efforts? Most of us don't. We focus on the immediate tasks at hand, often to the detriment of our personal growth and development. We lose out on potential opportunities as a result.

Although it might not always seem to be the case, your organization has a lot invested in your career and professional development. Replacing employees who leave because they aren't satisfied with their career development can be very expensive for companies. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), replacing a single employee can cost a company six to nine months of that employee's salary. The cost is not just in dollars and cents, though. There's also the loss of the employee's professional knowledge and business relationships.

My employer, SMART Technologies, has recently launched an initiative to address this issue and help its employees realize their career goals. This initiative is based on the GROW model for coaching and mentoring first developed in the United Kingdom by Sir John Whitmore, Alan Fine, Graham Alexander, and others. The GROW model consists of four distinct stages:

- Goal
- Reality
- Options
- Will

In each stage, you complete a series of activities that help clarify the goal you want to achieve for your career and what you need to do to realize that goal.

I've been employed with SMART for over 11 years, and I've started using the GROW model to map out my future with the company. I've found the GROW model, at least as we've implemented it at SMART, is ideally suited to technical communicators. It relies on analysis and documentation skills that come naturally to most of us. The following is a quick summary of the four stages in the GROW model to show how you can use them to advance your career as well.

Goal: What Do I Want?

In the first stage of the GROW model, you define a specific goal for your career. Ask yourself where you want to be a year from now, five years from now, and even further out if appropriate. Be as detailed as possible and make your goal specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and timely (in other words, SMART).

This might seem daunting at first, particularly if you haven't thought about professional development in a long time. To help you define a goal, ask yourself questions like:

- What aspects of my job do I like the most?
- What aspects of my job do I like the least?
- What is an ideal work day for me?
- What have I done at work that I'm the most proud of?
- What tasks am I good at?
- What tasks do I need help with?
- Do I like learning new things, and how do I best learn?
- How willing am I to venture outside of my comfort zone?
- What resources are available to me to help advance my career?
- At the end of my career, what do I want to have achieved?

You might also find creating a career trajectory chart beneficial (see Figure 1). First, list all the milestones you've realized in your career so far. These could be things like graduating from college or university, taking on a new job, being promoted to a new position, winning an industry award, presenting at a conference, and so on. Next, plot these milestones on a graph. The X axis of this graph represents time, and the Y axis represents your level of satisfaction with the milestones. When you're done, you'll have a visual representation of your career so far and a means of determining what activities have given you the most satisfaction in the past and that you might want to pursue in the future (see Figure 1).

Reality: What's Happening Now?

After you've defined a goal for your career, you next need to assess your current situation. A simple but effective way to do this is to complete a SWOT analysis. Assess your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats by asking yourself the following questions:

- What are my personal strengths, and how can I use them to realize my goal?
- What are my personal weaknesses, and how are they preventing me from realizing my goal?

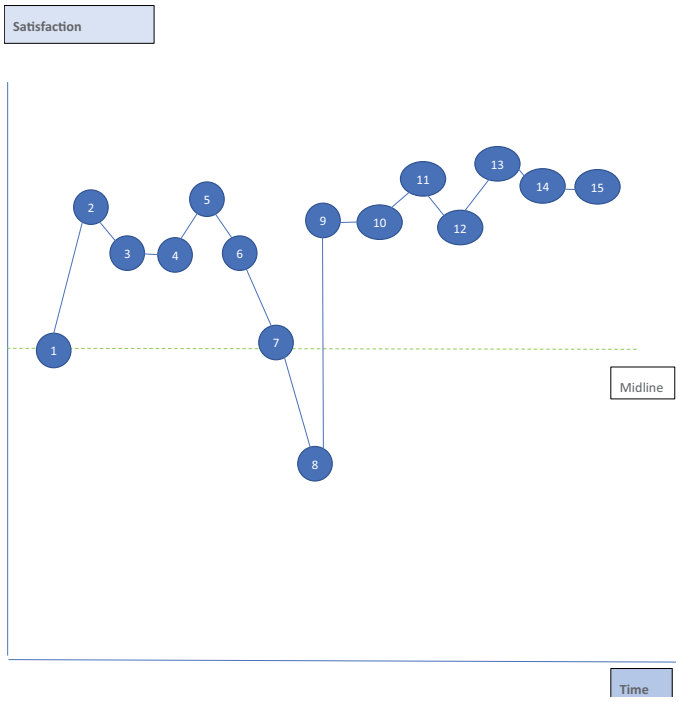


Figure 1. Sample career trajectory chart.

- What external opportunities are there in my company and industry that can help me realize my goal?
- What external threats are there in my company and industry that are preventing me from realizing my goal?

It's also helpful to get the perspective of others. Ask your manager, co-workers, and others for honest feedback about you and your career goal. If your company conducts 360-degree reviews, these are a great opportunity for such feedback.

Another helpful resource for this stage in the GROW model is a personality assessment. Many companies offer personality assessments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to their employees. You can also find a lot of information about such assessments on the Web. Knowing your personality type, and what motivates and demotivates, you can be very useful when planning your career path.

Once you've completed this stage of the GROW model, you should have a solid understanding of your current situation and what you need to do to realize your career goal.

Options: What Could I Do?

In this stage of the GROW model, you assess all the options available to you to realize your goal.

Although a promotion might be one option available to you, it's usually not the only one, and might not be the best for you. Also consider lateral moves to take advantage of transferable skills. If you're a technical writer, some career options include marketing writer, technical editor, technical trainer, information architect, and user experience specialist.

Make sure you're aware of how your company advertises job openings and its policies around internal mobility. Many employers advertise positions internally before making them available externally. It's also wise to have a good working relationship with your current manager and the managers of any departments you're interested in joining.

It might be some time before an opening in your desired position becomes available. If your company allows job shadowing, take this opportunity to not only learn more about the job in the meantime but also to show your interest in the position.

Also keep in mind that there may be opportunities for you in your company that don't already exist. For example, your company might not have a user experience specialist, but you have all the skills to take on such a role. You'll need to write a proposal explaining why the company should create this position for you. The good news is the information you gathered in the first two stages of the GROW model are an excellent starting point for such a proposal.

Will: What Will I Do?

In the final stage of the GROW model, you enact a plan to realize your career goal using the information you gathered in the previous three stages.

Like any good plan, your career plan should consist of discrete tasks with timelines and measurable results. Share your plan with your manager. You manager is, after all, a partner in your career development.

In addition to recruiting your manager, consider recruiting a mentor. A mentor can be someone who works in the position you aspire to, or whose career path you admire. You will be pleasantly surprised by the insights a good mentor can provide as you complete your career plan. As you advance in your career, you might want to consider becoming a mentor yourself.

If you, your manager, and your mentor determine that you need to upgrade your skills, consider joining a professional organization, attending a conference or other training opportunity, or investing in relevant books. Although you may need to submit expenses, you have a solid business case for doing so due to your previous efforts in the GROW model.

As you complete tasks in your plan, document your resulting accomplishments. Collaboration tools like SharePoint or Confluence are great resources for showcasing such accomplishments. Alternatively, you can use the authoring tools you have available to you as a technical communicator to create a professional development portfolio. Regardless of the method you use to capture your professional development journey, remember to bring your work with you when it comes time to interview for your new position. The interviewer will more than likely appreciate the effort you've made.

Finding the Time to GROW

At this point, you might see how following the GROW model can help with advancing your career, but you might also be wondering where you'll find the time to complete all this extra work.

Start by talking with your manager and your company's human resources department. Your company might have a policy that allows you to dedicate a certain percentage of your time to professional development. If it doesn't, review your work schedule. You might find that you have lulls during certain times of the month or in the product development life cycle. Take advantage of these lulls to work on professional development. Another option is to review how you work and see if there are efficiencies to be gained by automating or streamlining processes. You'll make time for professional development *and* improve the quality of your current work experience.

Our jobs keep us busy—we wouldn't be employed if they didn't—but making time for professional development is important, too. If we don't grow in our careers, we quickly become unsatisfied and unproductive as a result. Planning for professional development using an approach like the GROW model, and dedicating even as few as a couple of hours a month to professional development, are good ways to keep both our careers and our jobs on the right track.

KEN SCHATZKE (kenschatzke@smarttech.com) *is a Senior Technical Writer with SMART Technologies in Calgary, Canada. Ken is part of a team of technical communicators who create support materials for SMART's suite of interactive touch displays and collaborative technology. He is a Senior Member of STC, a Certified Professional Technical Communicator (CPTC), and a long-time volunteer with the Alberta Chapter.*

RESOURCES

"MBTI Basics." The Myers & Briggs Foundation. Accessed 4 March 2019. *https://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics.*

"SWOT Analysis: Discover New Opportunities, Manage and Eliminate Threats." *MindTools.com.* Accessed 4 March 2019. *https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm.*

"The GROW Model of Coaching and Mentoring: A Simple Process for Developing Your People." *MindTools.com.* Accessed 4 March 2019. *https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_89.htm.*

Clark, Tim, Alexander Osterwalder, and Yves Pigneur. *Business Model You: A One-Page Method for Reinventing Your Career.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2012.

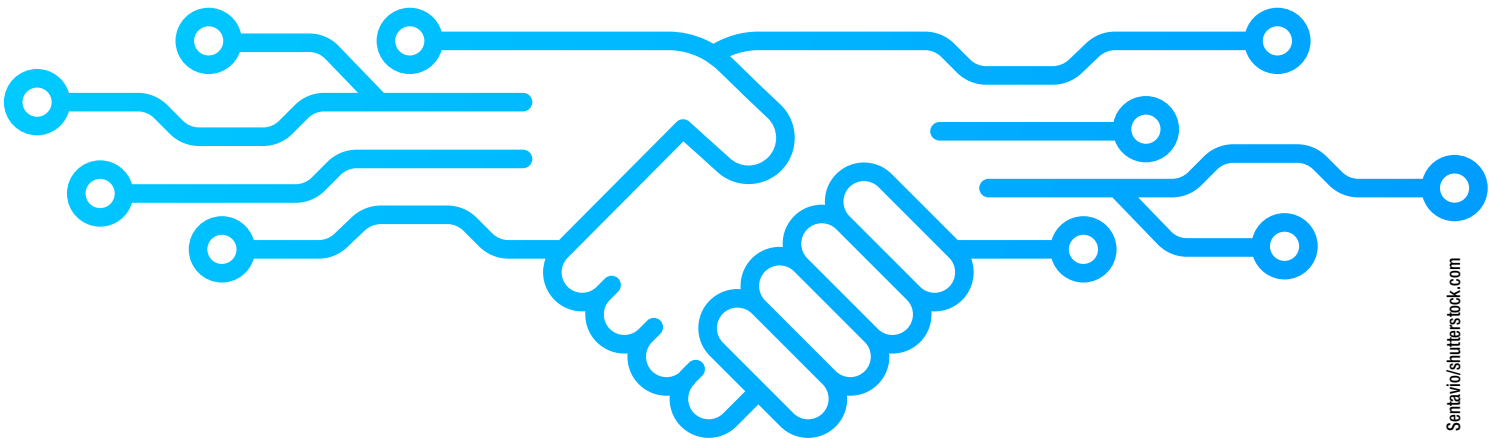
Haughey, Duncan. "SMART Goals." Project Smart. Accessed 4 March 2019. *https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/smart-goals.php.*

Merhar, Christina. "Employee Retention – The Real Cost of Losing an Employee." *PeopleKeep Small Business Employee Benefits and HR Blog.* Accessed 4 March 2019. *https://www.peoplekeep.com/blog/bid/312123/employee-retention-the-real-cost-of-losing-an-employee.*

Purposeful Partnership:

Code for America Brigades as a Professional Development Network for Technical Writers

By JASMINE R. AMERIN and ERICA M. STONE



Sentavio/shutterstock.com

Current Trends in Technical Communication Professional Development

In the December 2018 issue of *Intercom*, Saul Carliner and Yuan Chen reviewed current trends in the professional development of the technical communication industry, as collected in the STC Census. According to this data, the top two "go-to" sources for professional development were blogs and books, while events or even journals and social media trailed far behind. Surprisingly, only 6 percent of census participants reported attending events (training classes, webinars, conferences, and meetings) to sharpen their skills and understand the shifting trends in the field. Near the end of their review, Carliner and Chen noted their concern for the large percentage of technical communicators who indicated that they do not plan to pursue much professional development in 2019. In this article, we address this disengagement problem by proposing a different kind of professional development based on purposeful partnership and mutual benefit.

The Need for Professional Development

In order to keep up with the evolution of the field, professional development is necessary for both seasoned technical communicators and those just starting out in the industry. When assessing the age groups of technical communicators, the census found that those in the workforce tended to be age 50 or older. In the same vein, the relatively low ratio of technical communicators below the age of 35 raised apprehension regarding the long-term trajectory of the occupation. Consequently, concerns related to professional development now extend past professionals and reach to newcomers. How can the technical communication field appeal to younger generations and inspire more diverse demographics? By exploring the activities through which inexperienced individuals may develop a genuine interest in technical communication and the skills required, we can identify better ways to market the work of technical communicators to newcomers, novice technical writers, and students alike.

The Shortage of Professional Development for Students and Novice Practitioners

Outside of internships or STC chapter meetings and webinars, a novice technical writer or a student majoring in technical writing might be hard-pressed to find a place to learn new technical communication skills. Twenty-three years after Spinuzzi (1996) implored us to introduce students and novice practitioners to the field of technical writing in a setting that isn't epistemic and pseudotransactional, we still don't have a localized community of practitioners working toward a common cause or project in which we can offer the space to practice new skills and learn new genres.

Code for America: An Untapped Professional Development Network for Technical Writers

While STC provides a community for academics and professionals alike to learn new skills and understand shifts in the field, it does not frequently offer opportunities for transactional practice with a specific goal or product in mind. We propose a new network for technical communicators to engage in free, localized, community-focused, professional development: Code for America.

As a start-up, nonprofit organization supporting a network of people committed to making government processes and technologies more accessible, Code for America is an untapped resource for technical writers seeking purposeful professional development opportunities. With a focus on social advocacy and digital innovation for local governments, Code for America's local brigades work on volunteer-proposed projects where technical writers can sharpen their skills as project managers, UX designers, usability testers, content writers, coders, and social media marketers. With additional opportunities to translate processes and information between coders and subject matter experts, Code for America brigades provide ample opportunity for technical writers to write transactionally and learn the genres of our field (Spinuzzi 1996).

Code for KC: A Brief Case Study

Code for Kansas City, the local Code for America brigade with which our Advanced Technical Writing class partnered for the Spring 2019 semester, works in collaboration with KC Digital Drive, a local 501(c)3 and the umbrella organization for Code for KC, to solve technical problems in the Kansas City, Missouri, area.

Figure 1. Code for KC website homepage where volunteers can review GibHub readme files and learn about in-process and delivered projects.

Some of the applications Code for KC has developed are:

- CommunityKC, a networking tool designed to connect local civic groups
- Clear My Record, a semi-automated system for helping low-income residents find and clear their criminal records to increase the chances of being hired for a job or renting an apartment
- Tagging Tracker, an environmentally friendly tracking initiative that aims to reduce and remove graffiti from public infrastructure

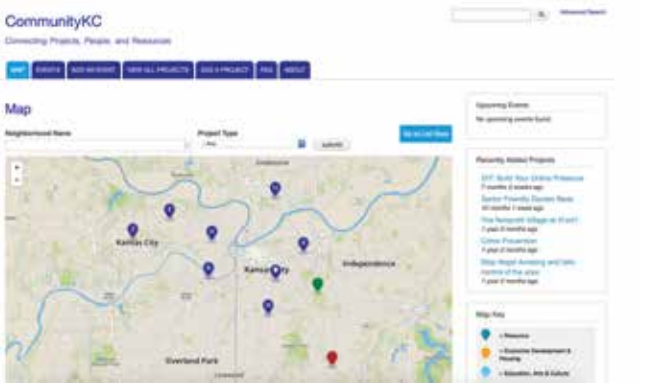


Figure 2. CommunityKC homepage where Kansas City residents can locate projects they may be interested in volunteering for. Organizations are sorted by type, location, and self-described volunteer needs.

Figure 3. Current "Give Stuff" page for Re.Use.Full, which continues to be revised as advanced technical writing students produce the content.

Our Service-Learning Project

Re.Use.Full, one of Code for KC's most recent, environmentally friendly projects, aims to reduce waste and promote recycling by connecting donors to organizations that have a use for the reusable items. As of January 2019, Re.Use.Full was still being conceptualized, which made it the perfect opportunity for a community-focused, service-learning project—particularly for an asynchronous, online class where face-to-face contact would be limited to scheduled Zoom meetings and coffee meetups.

Avoiding Hyperpragmatism in Service Learning

In addition to being designed to meet the rhetorical situation of an asynchronous, online learning environment, the course addressed the needs of our community partner and to remain cognizant of the possibility for service-learning courses—especially those in technical communication—to become hyperpragmatic (Scott 2004). To combat this tendency, a significant portion of the course was spent on reflective, collaborative work where students focused on articulating our progressive process, not just with one another, but with our community partner. Following J. Blake Scott's suggestion to use participatory design principles and an intercultural inquiry process that mirrored the values of cultural and community rhetorics (2004), our class engaged in a partnership with Code for KC that was focused on an iterative, agile development process, cross-cultural and intercultural communication practices, and mutually beneficial final deliverables.

The Mutual Benefits of Purposeful Partnership

The thoughtful, agile progression of the course allowed students to work toward substantial content creation, mirroring that which would be used in a professional technical communication setting—a process that could be replicated by technical writers seeking professional development opportunities in their own communities. While the Code for America brigade gains valuable resources to further its cause, participating technical writers gain insight into the kinds of dialogue, genres, and processes that might be needed for a particular deliverable (e.g., a website or application). Through Zoom meetings and discussion boards, the deliverables designed for Re.Use.Full function beyond just a gradebook or a seminar, and this ultimately works to promote a mutually beneficial experience for all stakeholders.

Remembering Pragmatic Benefits of Purposeful Partnership

Upon completion of the course, students will have a set of deliverables that can be included in their senior portfolios. For our class, those include:

- Web 1.0 content, such as a home page
- Instruction sets for two different user groups
- Regulatory content, including terms and conditions
- Web 2.0 content, including a single-author blog post
- Community development plan

The same kind of opportunity exists for any novice or experienced technical writer working with Code for America brigades.

Above all, a partnership with a Code for America brigade promotes purpose and drive amongst those involved. Knowing that their dedicated work will bring a net benefit to the community, students are more likely to value their own efforts. Producing deliverables for a nonprofit organization in need is much more pressing than the completion of a writing assignment that ultimately plays no part in the greater good of the world outside of a classroom or grading scale. Along this line of thought, nonprofit partnerships also provide students with an introduction to conducive professional pressure. Deadlines appear to have more weight when the necessary deliverables have specific functions and impact others.

Building Community through Professional Development

As demonstrated by our brief case study, partnerships with nonprofit organizations pose a particularly gratifying opportunity for students and professionals alike to explore concepts of technical communication and to hone relevant skills. In her 2015 article, "Building Identity and Community through Research," Carolyn Rude recognizes the reciprocal relationship between research and practice, reminding us that the field's sustainability depends on a healthy relationship between academia and industry, but perhaps even more importantly, that a "sense of community and a practice of collaboration have always been a part of what makes technical communication appealing as a field, and those values continue to define it" (Rude 2015). Not only does Code for America provide a space for purposeful professional development, but it also offers an opportunity for technical writers in every city with a brigade to collaborate with community organizers and

local governments in the resolution of technical problems and—perhaps most importantly—to build community.

The Importance of Local Partnerships and Community Engagement

Unlike more conventional internships or collegiate courses that incorporate service learning, local community partnerships offer a sustained benefit for participating students and universities, as well as the community partner. The same kind of benefits are available for practitioners seeking meaningful professional development opportunities, too, and Code for America provides a valuable learning space to work with cross-functional professionals, such as community organizers, government officials, and coders. These interactions open up further possibilities for networking and mentorships. Whether operating as a function of coursework, or in a professional development context, projects completed within community partnerships come with a higher perceived commitment due to the pressure of working with relevant outreach organizations that have explicit missions, expectations, stakeholders, and timelines. Ultimately, local partnerships and community engagement are invaluable for curriculum design and professional development alike.

Nonprofit Partnerships as Opportunities to Increase Diversity in the Field

The benefits of implementing nonprofit partnerships, however, go far beyond curriculum design and professional development. These partnerships are unique in their ability to increase the diversity of the technical communication field. In the branding study, "Who Technical Communicators Are: A Summary of Demographics, Backgrounds, and Employment," Carliner and Chen identify diversity as a challenge in the field of technical communication. The recent STC consensus found that 81 percent of technical communication professionals identified as White, while other racial groups and cultural associations were limited to a range of 2 to 5 percent. This statistic is alarming, as such skewed ratios of affiliation illustrate the unwittingly limited breadth of perspectives that the technical communication field represents. Every experience and background is valuable, and community-minded partnerships present a unique opportunity to increase diversity in the technical communication field.

Purposeful Partnership

The explorative and varied work of a partnership with a Code for America brigade supplies technical communicators seeking professional development with the appropriate introduction to several different aspects of community outreach and content development. Volunteering with a brigade can help technical writers explore and practice new skills, learn new genres, and build their local network. Regardless of your place in the technical communication field, a purposeful partnership with a Code for America brigade can be an enriching opportunity for professional development, but perhaps most importantly, the partnership can be a place where you can shape how your city solves complicated problems through innovative technologies and collaboration.

If you're interested in getting connected with one of the 73 local Code for America brigades for a mutually beneficial professional development opportunity, visit: *https://brigade.codeforamerica.org.*

Author Note: This article was written in partial fulfillment of Jasmine's capstone project in Erica's Advanced Technical Writing class at the University of Missouri - Kansas City.

JASMINE R. AMERIN (jasmine.amerin@gmail.com) *is a dual-degree student who has just completed her Bachelor of Science in Chemistry as an Honors College scholar at the University of Missouri - Kansas City. Jasmine is a driven student leader who balances her fascination for the sciences with her dedicated advocacy for women's rights and animal rights. As her undergraduate studies come to a close with the completion of her Bachelor of Arts in English Language & Rhetoric this summer, Jasmine intends to pursue a career in technical communication, and she is considering applying for a master's degree program in chemical engineering.*

ERICA M. STONE (stoneem@umkc.edu) *is a PhD candidate in the Technical Communication and Rhetoric program at Texas Tech University and an adjunct English Instructor at the University of Missouri - Kansas City where she teaches courses in civic and community engagement and technical communication. Erica works at the intersection of writing, teaching, and community organizing, and she is passionate about making academic scholarship free and accessible. In addition to her TED talk on the importance of publicly accessible, community-based research, her work has appeared in* Kairos *and* Community Literacy Journal *with forthcoming articles in* Basic Writing Electronic (BWe) Journal and Forum *in Fall 2019.*

REFERENCES

Carliner, Saul and Yuan Chen. "Who Technical Communicators Are: A Summary of Demographics, Backgrounds, and Employment." *Intercom*, 65.8 (2018): 8–16.

Carliner, Saul and Yuan Chen. "Professional Development of Technical Communicators." *Intercom*, 65.8 (2018): 17–22.

Rude, Carolyn. "Building Identity and Community Through Research." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 45.4 (2015): 366–380. *https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281615585753.*

Scott, J. Blake. "Rearticulating Civic Engagement Through Cultural Studies and Service-Learning." *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 13.3 (2004): 289–306. *http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15427625tcq1303_4.*

Spinuzzi, Clay. "Pseudotransactionality, Activity Theory, and Professional Writing Instruction." *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 5.3 (1996): 295–308. *https://doi.org/10.1207/s15427625tcq0503_3.*

STC Announces Most Improved Community and Community of the Year Awards

STC IS PLEASED to congratulate the winners of the 2019 Most Improved Community and Community of the Year awards. The winners were announced at the Honors Event on 7 May at the 2019 Technical Communication Summit & Expo.

The winner of the Most Improved Community Award is the Central New York Chapter!

The citation reads: *For your tenacious perseverance and dedication to growing your chapter. The STC Central New York Chapter demonstrates how the passion of its leaders can create a thriving community using new resources to reach out to new potential members.*

Congratulations to the Central New York Chapter and its members!

The winner of the Community of the Year Award is the Rochester Chapter!

The citation reads: *For a remarkable year containing excellent programs, outreach across communities, and your stellar Spectrum conference. STC Rochester exemplifies a successful, dynamic STC community that embraces education, communication, and collaboration.*

Congratulations to the Rochester Chapter and its members, and we thank all of the communities for their efforts this year.

President's Award

STC IS PLEASED to announce that Aiessa Moyna is the winner of the 2019 STC President's Award. The award was announced on Sunday, 5 May at the Opening General Session of the 2019 Technical Communication Summit & Expo in Denver, Colorado. The President's Award honors those who have made distinguished contributions to the profession of technical communication or the Society.

Aiessa's citation reads: *For your distinguished service to STC as Society Treasurer, Nominating Committee chair, and Associate Fellows Chair, your work on the STC Conference Committee, and your contributions in many other roles. Your thoughtful approach to these responsibilities and your devotion to the Society and to the discipline of technical communication exemplify the very best of volunteer leadership.*

Congratulations to Aiessa!

Share Yourself with *Intercom* Readers

WE'RE LOOKING FOR members to contribute a first-person column for a future issue of *Intercom*. The magazine has a trio of member-focused columns: My Job (your day-to-day work), Off Hours (discussing your hobby or side gig), Looking Back (a senior STC member discusses the history or significant moments in tech comm), Witful Thinking (tech comm humor), and In Memoriam (remembering STC members who have passed on). My Job takes a look at the day-to-day work of an STC member and what makes the job interesting, fun, or unique. Off Hours is a look at the side jobs and hobbies our members have. And Looking Back focuses on senior members providing perspective earned throughout their career. Would you like to share your story with *Intercom* readers? Email James Cameron, *james.cameron@stc.org*, for more information, samples, and to volunteer!

Peter Morville Named STC's 2019 Honorary Fellow

STC IS PLEASED to announce that Peter Morville has been named the 2019 Honorary Fellow. The award was announced on Sunday, 5 May at the Opening General Session of the 2019 Technical Communication Summit & Expo in Denver, Colorado. Peter was also STC's Opening Keynote speaker at that event.

The honor of Honorary Fellow is conferred upon a person who is not a member of the Society but who has achieved eminence in the field of technical communication or has performed a significant service for the Society.

The Honorary Fellow Committee felt strongly about recognizing Peter for his pioneering contributions to information architecture and user experience. He holds a graduate degree in Library and Information Science from University of Michigan School of Information. He has since served on their faculty and received an Alumni Achievement Award for his work in information science. Together with Louis Rosenfeld he headed Argus Associates, a consulting firm which supported one of the precursors of the Information Architecture Institute, the Argus Center for Information Architecture.

Peter is best known for being the author of the famous "polar bear book": *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web.* His latest book, *Planning for Everything,* is about the design of paths and goals. He has been helping people to plan since 1994, and advises such clients as AT&T, Cisco, IBM, eBay, Harvard, the Library of Congress, Macy's, Microsoft, and the National Cancer Institute. His work has been covered by Business Week, NPR, The Economist, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal.

His body of work has influenced a generation of professionals and organizations. His speaking and writing bring focused awareness to far-reaching information problems in such a way that helps people take real action.

Peter's citation reads: *For your groundbreaking work to define, advance, and promote the discipline of information architecture, and for revolutionizing the way we develop content and information systems through the lens of user experience.*

Congratulations to Peter, and thank you for your great Opening Keynote at the 2019 Summit!

CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL Technical Communicator

CPTC™ PRACTITIONER

PRACTITIONER CERTIFICATION

OPENS IN AUTUMN 2019

Certified Professional Technical Communicator™ (CPTC)

Be a leader. ***Have your Foundation Certification? Take your career to the next level by obtaining your Practitioner Certification.***

For more information about certification and to start the process, visit *www.stc.org* or email *stc@stc.org.*

Learn more at www.stc.org/certification

Transitioning to eLearning, Conducting Informational Interviews, and Professional Development Resources

vasabii/shutterstock.com

BY PHILISE BANNER | *Guest Columnist*

I have a lot of techcomm experience and want to transition into elearning. What are the differences and similarities between instructional design and techcomm skills?

Here are a few skills that will translate well to instructional design work:

- *Making the complex clear.* Technical communicators do a great job of taking content and making it simple to digest and understand. Instructional designers need to be able to do the same.
- *Structuring content.* Having the ability to sequence information to present to the user translates well into the instructional design space—learning is a scaffolded process, after all.
- *Providing direction.* Knowing where you are within any experience is inherent in good design. Making sure your learners know how to progress through a learning experience is an integral part of instructional design.

Ask a Tech Comm Manager is an advice column geared toward answering all those questions you have, but might be uncomfortable asking. We glean the questions from social media, forums, and most importantly, from you, dear reader. If we don't know an answer, we will interview experts and get information for you. Send Kit and Cindy your questions to *kitbh.stc@gmail.com* or tweet them to *@kitcomgenesis* or the hashtag *#askTCmgr.*

Before you make that transition, you may want to focus on:

- *Understanding how humans learn.* Learning theory guides the practice of instructional design. Take the time to learn about the evolution of those theories, and how they have impacted the evolution of instructional technologies.
- *Assessing how, when, and where learning takes place.* Most learning experiences are designed to be measured in some way. This requires a deep understanding of knowledge, emotion, and action-based domains that guide the development of measurable objectives and assessments in alignment with those objectives.
- *Facilitating interaction and dialogue.* Instructional design is all about bringing meaning and motivation to the learning experience through conversation and participation. The art of instructional design is knowing how and when to ask the right questions.

Here are some resources that you might find helpful:

- Excellent overview of learning theories: *https://www.learning-theories.com/*
- Kirkpatrick Model and Methodology, always good for beginner to advanced practitioners: *https://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/*
- How People Learn: *https://www.nap.edu/catalog/9853/how-people-learn-brain-mind-experience-and-school-expanded-edition* (although written from an education perspective, the principles and practices transition into any learning space).

What is an informational interview and how do I conduct one?

The goal of an informational interview is to research the type of skills you need, jobs you might be interested in doing, and companies or industries that might interest you. You are talking to people in your network to find out what they love about their jobs and what they think is important for job seekers. They typically do not have a job available at that moment. You can use an informational interview at any point in your career.

It differs from a job interview in that you are the one asking the questions. Kit wrote a more in-depth article on this topic for this issue. Check it out on page 23.

What are some resources where I can get more training on tools and other topics I'm interested in?

- *Lynda.com* (*www.lynda.com*) is now part of LinkedIn. There are courses for most tools that we use in our profession.
- *Coursera* (*www.coursera.org*): Many topics are covered here, from data science, gamification, and language to Web development and social entrepreneurship. Most courses are free and self-directed. The classes tend to be robust and high quality. Supported by multiple universities.
- *Udemy* (*www.udemy.com*): Most courses cost at least $10. Variable quality. Variety of topics.
- *Iversity* (*www.iversity.org*): Available in multiple languages, variety of topics. Variable quality. Supported by Springer Nature.
- *YouTube* (*www.youtube.com*): This is good if you just need a quick reminder for how to do something.

PHYLISE BANNER *has been designing, developing, and delivering learning experiences for over 25 years. She is a certified Learning Environment Architect and STC Fellow.*

Usability in Contexts of Care

Andy Shell/shutterstock.com

BY KIRK ST.AMANT | *STC Fellow*

USABILITY IS CENTRAL to effective communication in health and medical contexts. It reduces instances of individuals using medical technologies or medications in unintended ways. It also enhances the design of interfaces to ensure health-related information is effectively collected, stored, and accessed. However, achieving usability in health and medical settings requires an understanding of different environments.

Understanding Contexts of Care

Health and medical communication is about *care*—activities that maintain or restore one's level of health (e.g., doing something to keep a pulse rate at, or return it to, a particular level). Usability and design are often essential to providing effective care, because doing so requires individuals to use materials to perform a process. The dynamics of care are a matter of context — where individuals perform activities. Understanding this *context of care* is central to designing health and medical materials individuals can effectively use.

Ideally, the context of care is a medical facility where care is administered by trained medical professionals under optimal conditions. In reality, the context of care is often one where patients perform different care-related activities on themselves. Designing usable health and medical materials for such situations is not easy. It involves identifying factors affecting how individuals perform a process in a setting.

Identifying Usability Dynamics

Ideally, all patients would use medical materials under ideal conditions where individuals can perform a process the same way. In reality, lives are busy and when and where individuals perform care-related activities can vary from person to person. Accounting for such variation can be challenging, but not impossible. Technical communicators can use a sequence of questions to identify important usability factors in these contexts of care.

Question One: Where Do You Do X?

Where individuals perform an activity affects how they perform it. It is one thing to use a blood pressure monitor to check your blood pressure when sitting at your kitchen table. It is another to try to use that technology while on a commuter train traveling to or from work. Each setting contains different factors affecting usability in terms of what you can do (e.g., limits of physical space) and what you can use (e.g., access to power for electronic devices). Technical communicators need to be aware of such factors, so they can design materials that individuals can actually use in a given context of care.

Question Two: When Do You Do X?

Clarifying *when* individuals perform an activity helps identify what is going on in a particular space. It's one thing if an individual says, "I check my blood pressure when sitting at the table in my kitchen." It is another if that person explains, "I check my blood pressure at the end of the day while sitting at the kitchen table after I've picked up the kids from school and am making dinner for my family." The dynamics of what is taking place (or not) in a setting affects how much attention individuals can devote to a care-related activity. By knowing and addressing such factors, technical communicators can design materials that are more usable in a given context of care.

Question Three: Who Is in that Setting When You Do X?

The *who* factor can be important in terms of distraction or assistance. If other individuals are in a context of care, their actions could affect the care-related process being performed. The bustle of a busy common area, like a lunchroom, can create distractions for someone using a medical technology to perform a diagnostic (e.g., checking blood sugar) in that setting. Alternatively, the presence of individuals, such as family members in the kitchen, could represent individuals available to help with a process like putting on a blood

This column provides information on trends, practices, and resources for applying technical communication skills in health and medical settings. Contact Kirk at *kirk.stamant@gmail.com.*

pressure cuff. Technical communicators can use the knowledge of such dynamics to create materials that address such factors and are more usable in a particular context of care (e.g., create interfaces one can easily use in crowded spaces).

Question Four: What Do You Do After X?

The care-related activity one performs might be one step in a larger process. Technical communicators need to be aware of such factors when designing health and medical materials. Using a device to take one's blood pressure, for example, might be the first step in the process of providing the person's physician with regular updates on the individuals' health. For this reason, the design of materials needs to address this factor via instructions explaining how to share that information with the person's physician (e.g., "Go to the online site, log into your account, and enter your blood pressure readings") or designs that allow for such processes (e.g., a function that lets individuals upload information to a secure site where the physician can access it). By knowing and addressing such factors, technical communicators can design materials that address the overall objective of performing a care-related activity in a particular context.

Final Thoughts

Creating effective health and medical materials involves applying aspects of usability to different contexts of care. These questions represent a starting point that technical communicators can use to consider how to apply their skills in different health and medical settings. The better technical communicators understand the dynamics of contexts of care, the better they can create materials that are usable in such contexts.

If you are interested in learning more about this area, check out this column's resources, including Lisa Melonçon's work in patient experience design (PXD) and materials the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has created to promote usability in design practices.

RESOURCES

Melonçon, Lisa. "Patient Experience Design: Expanding Usability Methodologies for Healthcare." *Communication Design Quarterly* 5.2 (2017): 19–28.

Melonçon, Lisa. "Patient Experience Design: Technical Communication's Role in Patient Health Information and Education." *Intercom* 62.2 (2016): 12–16.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "Premarket Information - Device Design and Documentation Processes," 2018. *https://www.fda.gov/medicaldevices/deviceregulationandguidance/humanfactors/ucm119190.htm*

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "Applying Human Factors and Usability Engineering to Medical Devices," 2016. *https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/applying-human-factors-and-usability-engineering-medical-devices*

Transform your career.

Join STC today.

HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION
TRUSTED RESOURCES
EXPERIENCED CONNECTIONS
PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

stc.org
+1 (703) 522-4114
membership@stc.org

STC

Considering the Axis of Power in Technical Communication

BY RUSSELL WILLERTON | *STC Member*

AS I PONDERED what I should write for this edition of the ethics column, I thought back to something I learned about ethics from the scholarship of the late Tyanna K. "Ty" Herrington, JD PhD. She wrote about using the "axis-of-power" test to help determine an ethical course of action.

Testing Options for Ethical Value

In her 2003 book, *A Legal Primer for the Digital Age*, Herrington writes that some behavior may be legal without being ethical. Laws in the United States that supported slavery, for example, are clearly seen as unethical and immoral today. When the law does not identify a clear path toward making an ethical choice, we must consider the options carefully. Herrington describes three familiar tests of ethics before adding a fourth.

The first test is about universalization: could a certain path in a particular ethical quandary lead to behavior that is universally good? This follows the idea of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative: if an action is universally right and ethical, then a person should do it categorically, without exception. If the action is not universally good, it might not be a strong ethical choice.

The second test involves existing practice: is this behavior frequently endorsed in a particular setting or industry? Herrington notes the test of existing practice puts the responsibility for a given message onto the audience rather than onto the creator of the message. This practice may mislead an audience without lying outright. When an existing practice leads to unfairness or an imbalance of power, it is likely unethical.

The third test involves utility: if the benefit of an action outweighs its detriments, or the balance favors the good over the bad, it may be considered ethical. Like the other tests, each test for utility involves a specific situation. While the utility test is frequently called a cost-benefit analysis, note that some costs, benefits, or detriments may be harder to measure or estimate than others.

Given the limitations of the first three tests, Herrington offers the axis-of-power test for identifying ethical outcomes in communication. The axis-of-power test is based on the concept that those who have power to act or communicate information to others also have responsibility to act and communicate honestly and completely, without hiding misdeeds, misleading people, or masking information. "In this way, communicators will not take advantage of others by misusing the power that comes with having information or controlling behavior" (Herrington 2003).

After the passage I quoted, Herrington points to an article she published (1995) on a federal government report about the 1993 shootout in Texas between law enforcement personnel and members of the Branch Davidian religious cult led by Vernon Howell (a.k.a. David Koresh). This article focuses on tables in a report from the Department of the Treasury, which include information on those who were injured or killed in the shootout. She shows that the tables listing the ATF agents are easier to read because they use mixed-case, 12-point type, and the wounds are described in familiar language (e.g., gunshot wounds to both legs, shrapnel wounds to the right hand). Herrington points out that the tables include even superficial injuries to the ATF agents. In contrast, the Branch Davidians (referred to as "cult members") are listed in tables with all-caps, 10-point type that is less easy to read. Information such as the distance at which cult members were shot and killed is included. Because each wound the deceased Branch

Novikov Aleksey/shutterstock.com

This column features ethics scenarios and issues that may affect technical communicators in the many aspects of their jobs. If you have a possible solution to a scenario, your own case, or feedback in general, please contact column editor Russell Willerton at *russell.willerton@gmail.com.*

Davidians received is described in a separate line, readers get the impression that the ATF agents fired their weapons with skill and precision and that, for two Branch Davidians, fatal shots fired by fellow Branch Davidians were especially cruel. On the other hand, the Branch Davidians' shots that hit AFT agents are described collectively (e.g., "gunshot wounds to both legs"), which diminishes the sense of the shooters' skills. Those killed by ATF agents had a "weapon to wound" range of "distant," while those killed by other Branch Davidians had ranges from "less than one inch" to "more than 4 ft."

Herrington writes that the overall effect of the representation of information in the ATF report is to manipulate readers to focus more on the deaths and injuries suffered by the ATF agents than on the list of deaths and injuries to Branch Davidians. Even if readers do "peruse the graphics from beginning to end, they may not realize that four ATF agents died, whereas the total deaths of Branch Davidians resulting from the skirmish near Waco was six" (Herrington 1995). In this instance, those who prepared the report used their power to present the information in a way that put the ATF agents in one light and the Branch Davidians in a different light. These differences in presentation do not pass the axis-of-power test.

Applying the Axis-of-Power Test

Herrington (2003) identifies several instances in which someone with more information or power in a situation could use it unfairly against someone else, failing the axis-of-power test for ethical behavior. Here are a few such situations:

Some companies work with hazardous chemical substances. Few such substances are banned by law. What if a new substance is technically different from a banned or restricted substance but is functionally very similar? How would you write about handling and transporting such substances?

Some companies are tempted to oversell their abilities or overinflate their credentials. What if you overpromise to land a contract that you know you cannot fulfill on time, while agreeing to a contract that is vague enough to make it hard to breach?

What if you get frustrated with a client or co-worker, and you make a design choice in a report that draws attention to something negative about that person's performance?

What if you are a senior technical communicator with a lot of projects looming, and you offload an outsized number of projects onto a new hire under the guise of training that person?

J. Blake Scott discusses ethics using a fictitious company called Vaccitech that makes flu vaccines. The company has a new flu vaccine proven safe and effective for those from ages 5 to 49 (Scott 2013). While tests with younger and older people outside that range are ongoing, a marketing executive asks you to include pictures of toddlers and of senior citizens into marketing materials for the vaccine. Given your knowledge of the tests so far, should you do that?

Other areas in which the axis-of-power test may frequently prove useful include privacy policies and the handling of users' personal online data, as well as obtaining individuals' informed consent to participate in testing and data collection. If people really understood what your company would do with their data, would they provide it?

As Sir Francis Bacon said centuries ago, knowledge is power. As ethical technical communicators, we should avoid hiding knowledge or masking information in a way that leads people to make decisions against their best interests.

Remembering Ty Herrington

Ty Herrington was a respected and beloved member of the academic community in technical communication. Her research areas included intellectual property (informed by her work and training in law) and international technical communication (informed by her work as a Fulbright Senior Scholar in Russia). In addition to many articles and book chapters, Ty wrote three books: *Intellectual Property on Campus: Students' Rights and Responsibilities* (2010), *Controlling Voices: Intellectual Property, Humanistic Studies, and the Internet* (2001), and *A Legal Primer for the Digital Age* (2003).

After earning her PhD in technical communication and rhetoric from Texas Tech, Ty taught at Georgia Tech for more than two decades. Ty was an active member of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication, and the National Council of Teachers of English. Colleagues in these organizations remember her insightful scholarship and her welcoming attitude toward everyone, whether an established professor or a graduate student new to the field. Ty Herrington died of cancer in 2018.

RESOURCES

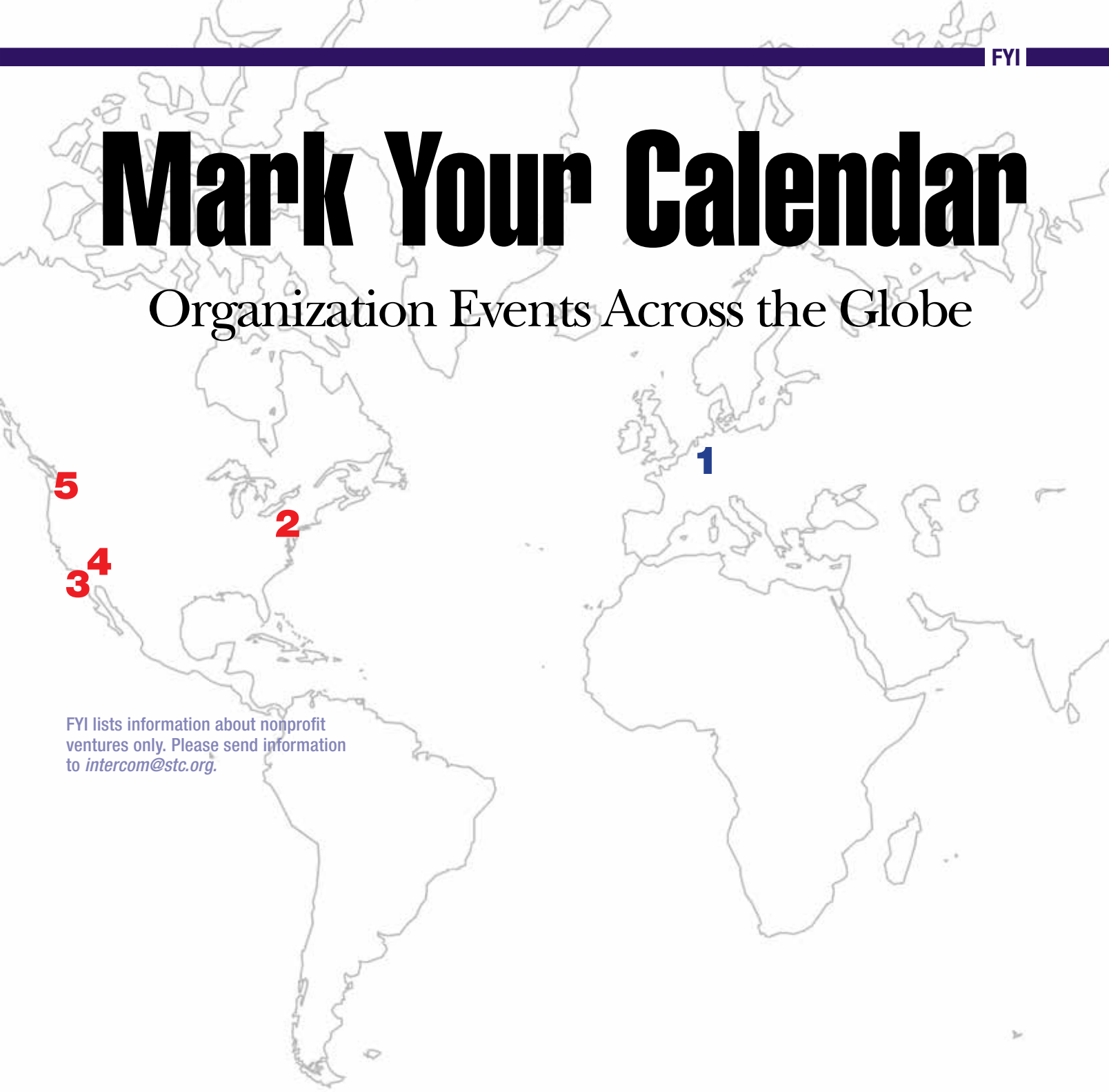
Herrington, Tyanna K. *A Legal Primer for the Digital Age*. Allyn & Bacon Series in Technical Communication. New York: Pearson, 2003.

Herrington, Tyanna K. "Ethics and Graphic Design: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Document Design in the *Report of the Department of the Treasury on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Investigation of Vernon Wayne Howell also Known as David Koresh*." *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* 38.3 (1995): 151–157.

Scott, J. Blake. "How Can Technical Communicators Work in an Ethical and Legal Manner?" In *Solving Problems in Technical Communication*, eds. Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (2013): 217–236.

Mark Your Calendar

Organization Events Across the Globe



FYI lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 23-26 July
The **IEEE International Professional Communication Conference** (ProComm) 2019 will take place in Aachen, Germany at the Super C Building of RWTH Aachen University from 23 to 26 July.
ProComm
https://attend.ieee.org/procomm/
ieee-mce@ieee.org

2 10-12 Oct
The **Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication** (CPTSC) will be holding its annual conference 10–12 October 2019 at West Chester University in West Chester, Pennsylvania.
CPTSC
https://cptsc.org/conference/
conference@cptsc.org.

3 20-22 Oct
The **Public Relations Society of America** (PRSA) will be holding its annual conference 20–22 October 2019 at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina Hotel in San Diego, CA.
PRSA
http://apps.prsa.org/Conferences/InternationalConference/

4 23-26 Oct
The **American Translators Association** (ATA) will hold its 60th annual conference 23–26 October 2019 at the Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, CA.
ATA
https://www.atanet.org/conf/2019/

5 28 Oct-1 Nov
The **Human Factors in Ergonomics Society** (HFES) will be holding its annual conference 28 October-1 November 2019 at the Sheraton Grand Seattle.
HFES
http://www.hfes2019.org/
llawson@hfes.org

* STC-related event

The Editor's Lot

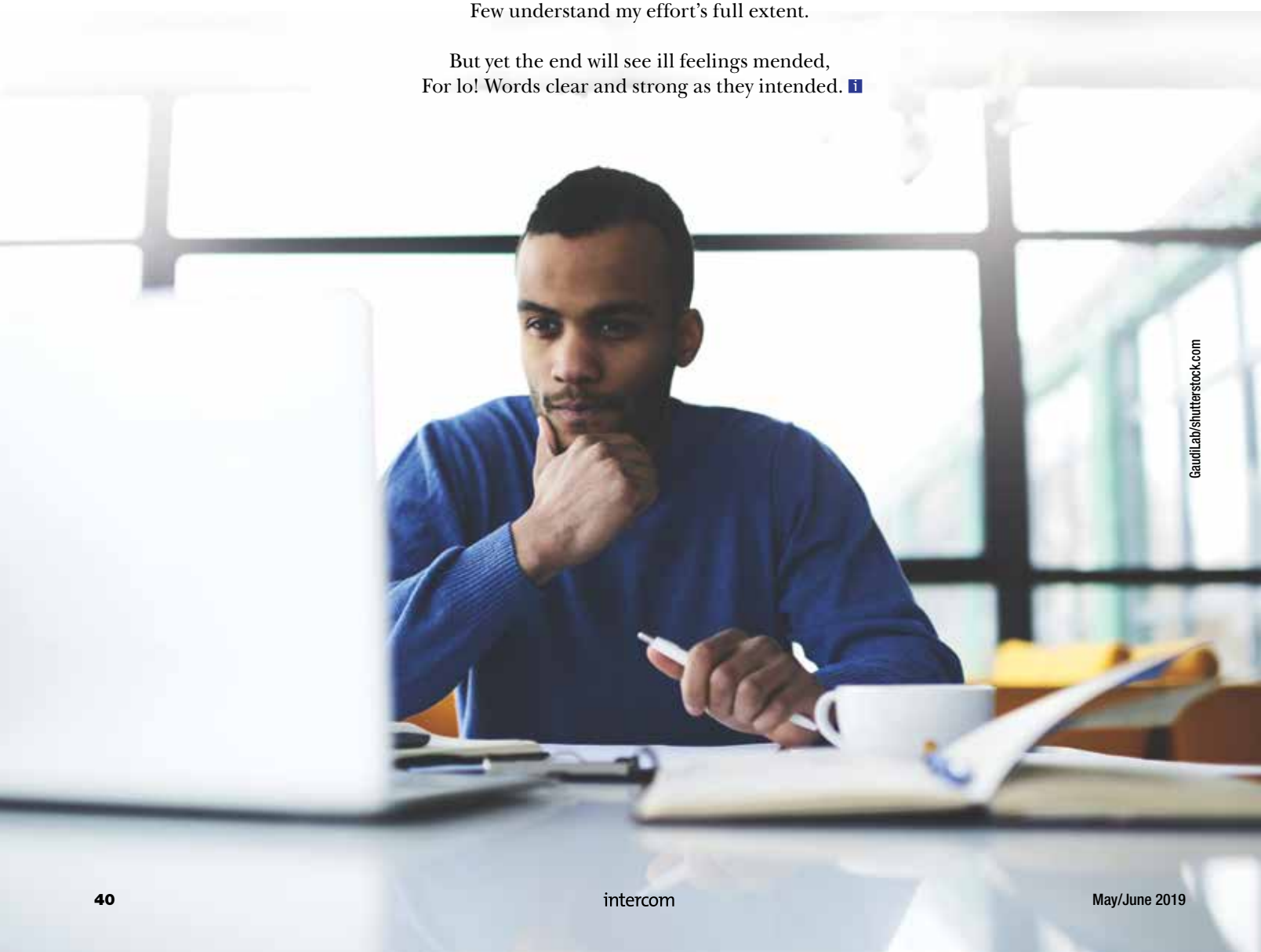
BY AMANDA LEWANSKI | *STC Senior Member*

Arise, my soul, and once more sit thee down
To polish others' words and burnish bright
Their messages that hint or hide or drown,
As if you had not done so half the night.

These folk are brilliant thinkers in their fields
And cut the edge of research many ways,
Yet oft their writing but confusion yields,
And thus awards and projects meet delays.

Some seek me out and humbly beg my time;
Some come to me a-snarl at being sent.
Most, certain that their work is pure, sublime —
Few understand my effort's full extent.

But yet the end will see ill feelings mended,
For lo! Words clear and strong as they intended.



GaudiLab/shutterstock.com

CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL

Technical Communicator

CPTC™

FOUNDATION

- **Project Planning**
- **Project Analysis**
- **Content Development**
- **Organizational Design**
- **Written Communication**
- **Reviewing & Editing**
- **Visual Communication**
- **Content Management**
- **Production & Delivery**

CONTACT

For more information about certification and to start the process, visit *www.stc.org* or email *stc@stc.org.*

Certified Professional Technical Communicator™ (CPTC)

Advance your Career and the Profession
Earn the CPTC Foundation Credential Today

The Certified Professional Technical Communicator (CPTC) credential assures employers, colleagues, and the public that you have the knowledge and skill to handle complex technical communication projects from the project planning stage through production and delivery.

Benefits

Why earn the CPTC credential? Because the CPTC credential:

- Distinguishes you from your peers;
- Shows you have the most up-to-date knowledge in the field;
- Opens up job opportunities and enhances job mobility;
- Elevates the profession;
- Gives you a sense of pride in your career; and
- Demonstrates your commitment to the field.

The CPTC credential gives you the edge you need to stand out to employers.

Continuing Education Requirements

Points may be obtained the following ways:

Event	Points
STC Annual Membership (any membership type for Foundation certificants)	2
STC Recorded Webinar (self-study)	1
STC Live Educational Webinar (free, sponsored, and community webinars excluded)	2
STC Online Courses	6
STC Summit Pre-Conference Courses (full day)	6
STC Summit Pre-Conference Courses (half day)	3
STC Annual Summit	8
Begin and complete a college-accredited course related to the Technical Communication field	8
Published articles that relate to any aspect of *Technical Communication* (2/article)	2
Published books publicly available on topics related to *Technical Communication* (5/book)	5
Presentations at conferences related to aspects of *Technical Communication* (2/presentation)	2
Total needed within 2 years post-certification date	**12**

Fees

Exam fees: STC Members $250, Non-Members, $495

Be a leader. ***Take your career to the next level by obtaining your credential. It's the most efficient way to prove your skills and knowledge in the technical communication field.***

Advance your Career and the Profession — Earn the CPTC Foundation Credential Today!
Learn more at www.stc.org/certification